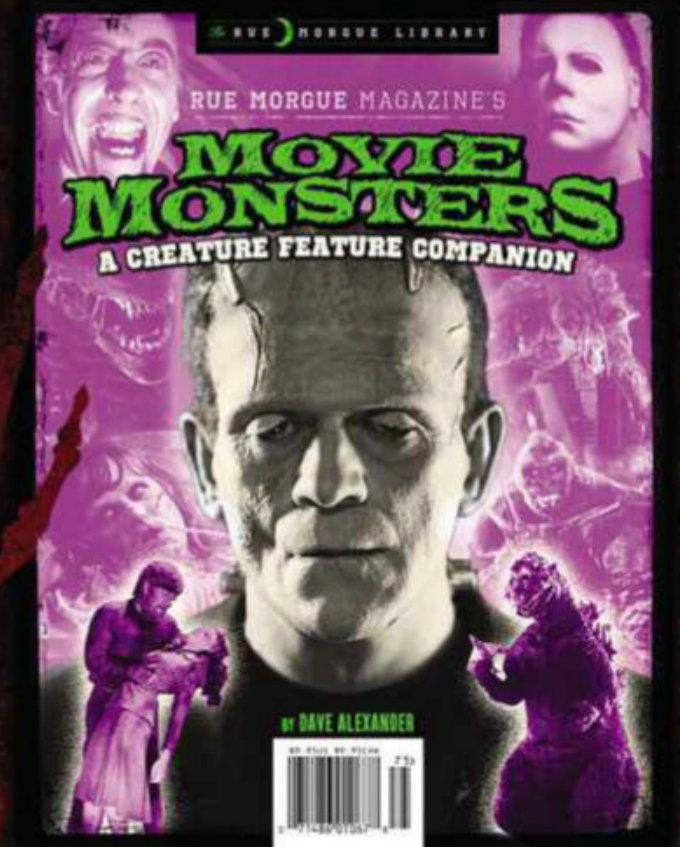
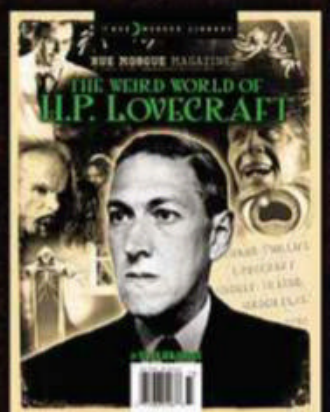
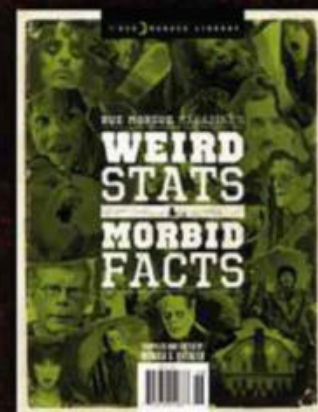
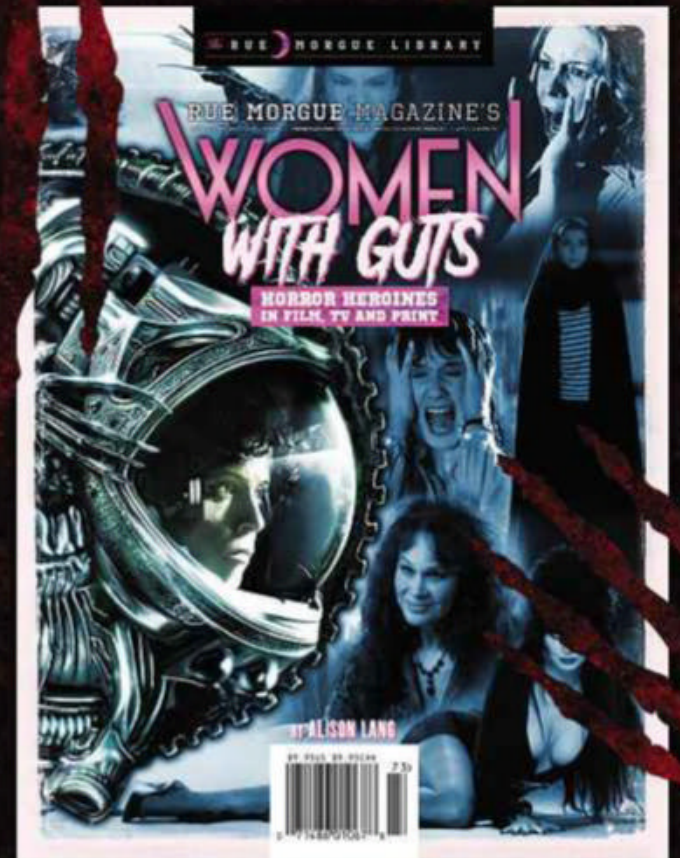
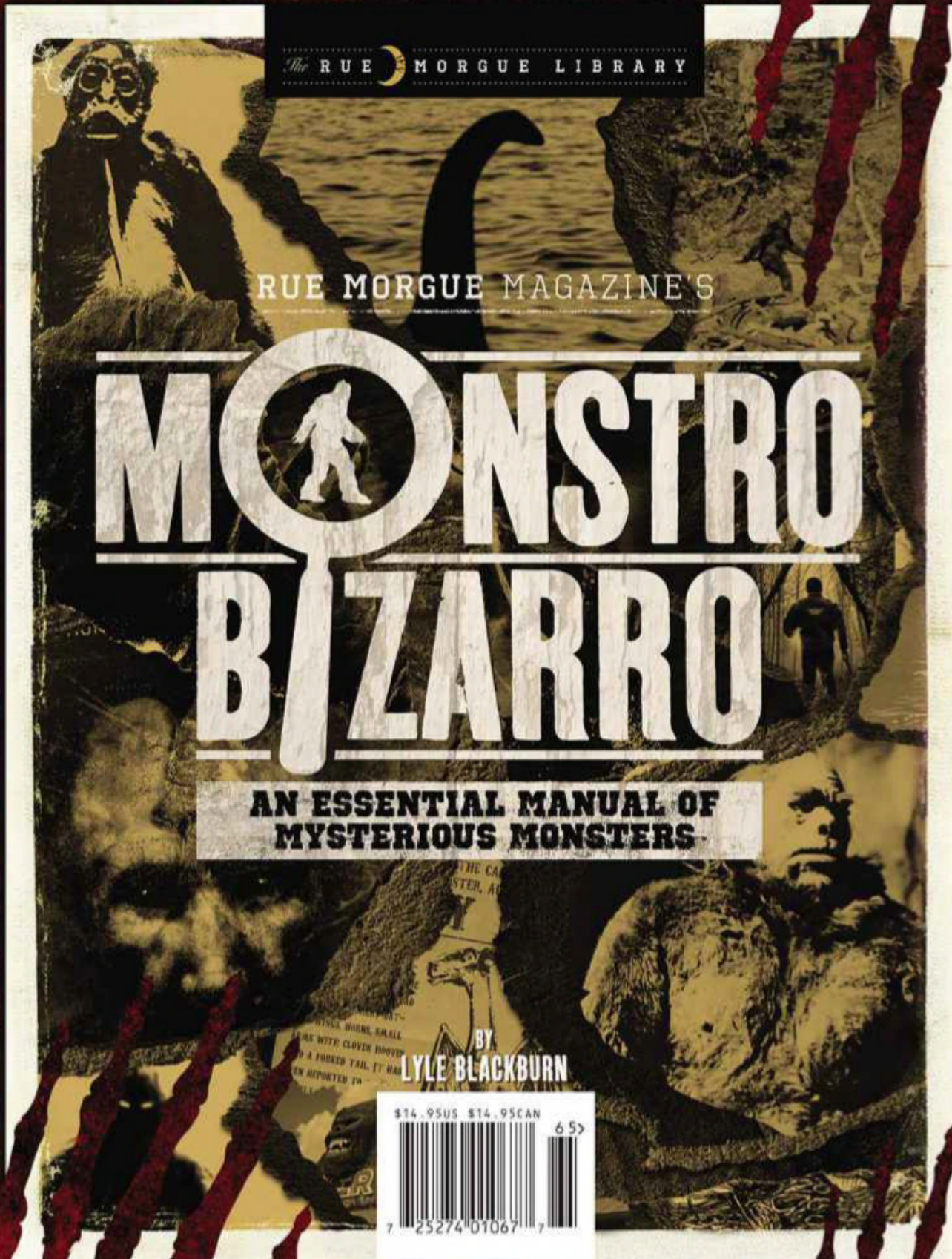


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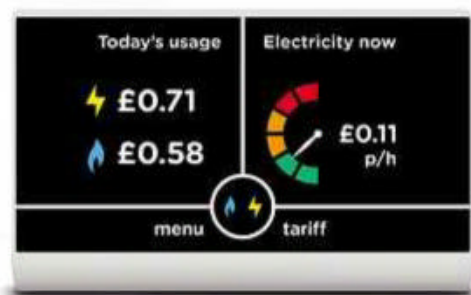
WHO WAS THE MASKED WALKER?

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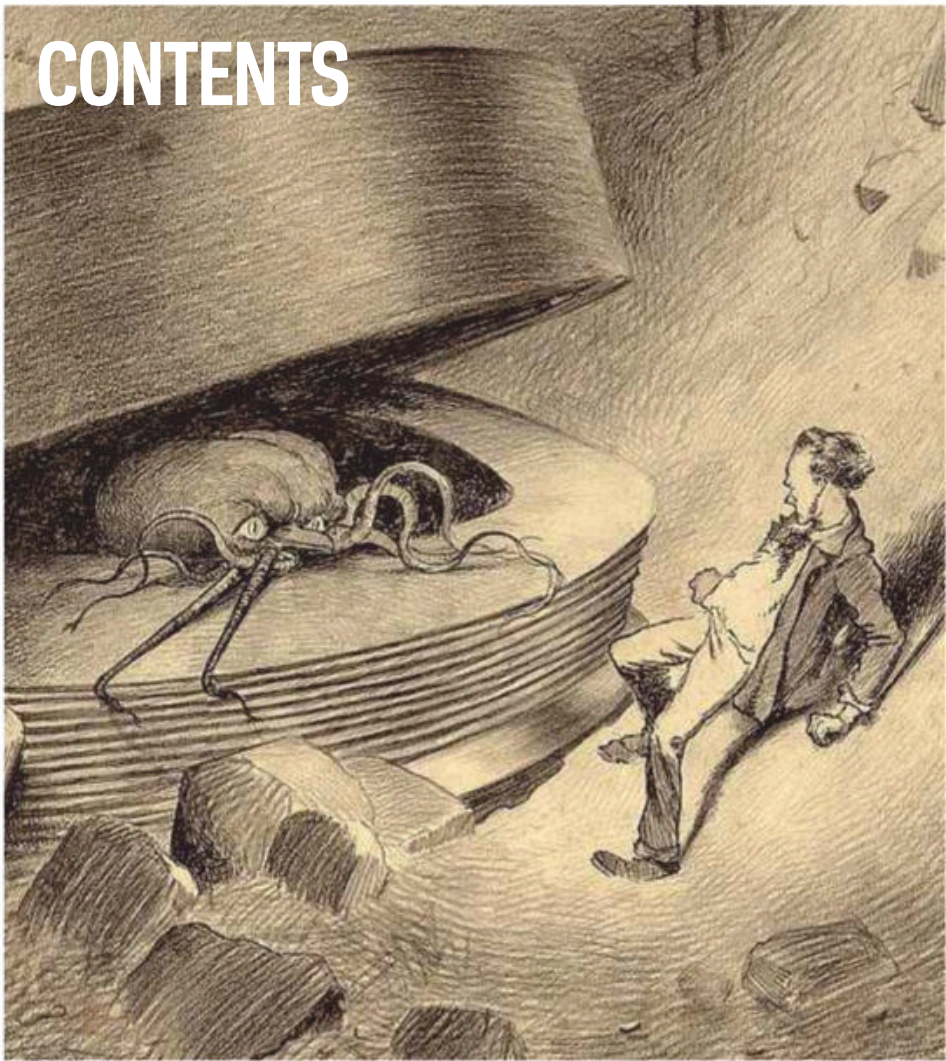
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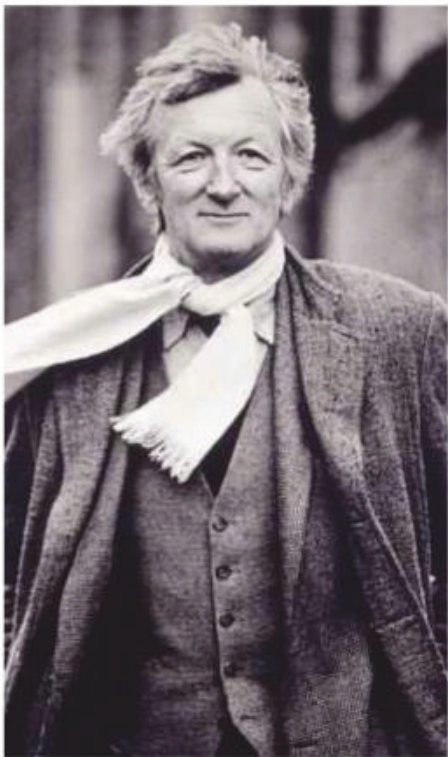
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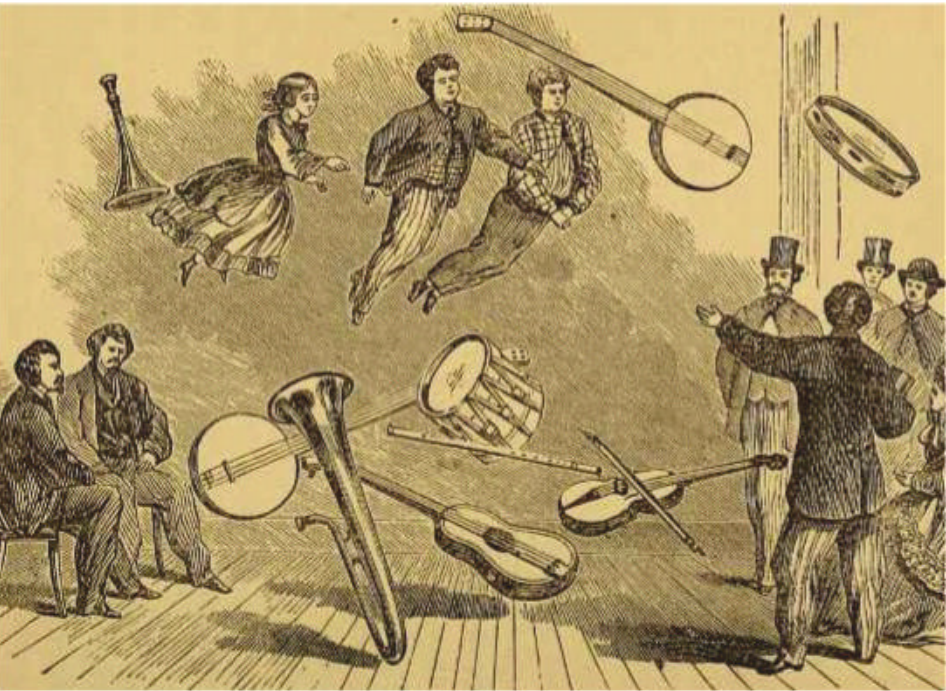
10 Octopuses from outer space



46 Making Albion hum



40 Who was the Masked Walker?



30 Raising children: levitation and supernatural transportation for kids

COVER: LEVITATING BOY - ANDREW SPENCER/UNSPLASH
STORMY SKY - ROLAND DENES/UNSPLASH
OCEAN - ZNODE/CREATIVE COMMONS
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FORTEAN TIMES 378

Why fortean ?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Haunted CCTV, food fads, phantom toilet flushers, Russia’s Dome of Light and more...

- 14 SCIENCE

16 STRANGE CONTINENT

18 ARCHÆOLOGY
- 20 GHOSTWATCH

25 MYTHCONCEPTIONS

28 THE UFO FILES

FEATURES

30 COVER STORY RAISING CHILDREN

BOB RICKARD presents the first part of a survey of tales concerning the levitation and teleportation of children – including abductions by fairies and ghosts, cases of mediumistic and shamanistic flight, and spontaneous supernatural abilities.

40 THE MASKED WALKER

Why did an Englishman declare he would wear an iron helmet and push a perambulator around the world? Who was this masked man? **JAN BONDESON** tells the strange story of the Masked Walker – hyperpedestrian or hoaxer?

46 JOHN MICHELL: MAKING ALBION HUM

Ten years ago this April, John Michell died and Britain lost its modern Merlin. On the anniversary of Michell’s death, **PHIL BAKER** celebrates the radical traditionalist and his unique body of work, while **STEVE MARSHALL** offers a previously unpublished poetic tribute...

REPORTS

52 STRANGE STATESMEN

Brexit Babylon **SD TUCKER**

60 BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

Remote Viewers **THE HIEROPHANT’S APPRENTICE**

FORUM

57 Witchcraft in the White House **TED HARRISON**

58 Citizen forteana **GORDON RUTTER**

REGULARS

- 02 EDITORIAL

63 REVIEWS
- 73 LETTERS

78 READER INFO
- 79 PHENOMENOMIX

80 STRANGE DEATHS

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

DO TRY THIS AT HOME!

REMEMBERING JOHN MICHELL

It's hard to believe that a decade has passed since we lost John Michell, who died on 24 April 2009. A modern visionary and tireless scholar of the strange – he was sometimes called 'Britain's unofficial Merlin' – John left behind an unforgettable legacy of written works and innumerable kindnesses. To mark the anniversary of his death, Phil Baker offers a summary of Michell's voluminous output, and a reminiscence of his only meeting with the man himself (p46). And Steve Marshall provides a celebration in verse of "Generous John" in the form of a previously unpublished poem read at a memorial gathering in Glastonbury back in June 2009 (p50). Each of these pieces will bring back happy memories for those who loved John or treasured his work, and we hope they will inspire newcomers to pick up one of his many books. For more about John Michell and the many aspects of fortean life on which he left an indelible mark, see "John Michell: A Modern Merlin", FT349:38-49 and Bob Rickard's obituary, FT250:26-27.



IT'S WEIRD UP NORTH

Just a reminder to readers 'Up North' that the annual gathering of forteans that is Weird Weekend North will be taking place over the weekend of 6-7 April in the Cheshire village of Rixton with Glazebrook, 14 miles from Manchester. The organisers promise two days packed with "cryptozoology, folklore, fairies, ghosts, forteana and other downright weird stuff", so do get along if you can. Full details and tickets at www.weirdweekendnorth.com/.

CITIZEN SCIENCE FOR FORTEANS

If you can't get to Weird Weekend to hear fortean researchers speaking, don't worry – you can conduct your own fortean investigations from the comfort of your own home (see p58). Our very own Gordon Rutter (whose secret identity is a school biology teacher) has been designing a series of experiments that anyone can do, requiring no special resources and minimal financial outlay. The experiments look at a

range of topics – from classics like dowsing and telepathy to talking to plants or seeing whether orgonite makes them grow better. Gordon has dubbed the project 'Citizen Forteana' (just like 'citizen science', but in the realm of damned data) and needs your help with it. Obviously, the more people get involved and share their results (both positive and negative), the bigger the data set Gordon will end up with. He'll be reporting on the results in a future issue of FT, so this is an exciting opportunity to take part in a unique project and see what comes out of it. Visit www.gordonrutter.com/citizen-forteana for more information.

ERRATA

FT373:9: Marinus van der Sluijs from Vancouver, Canada, writes: "In FT373, David Hambling imputed to pseudoscientist Immanuel Velikovsky the idea that "biblical catastrophes were the

result of close encounters with Planet X'. However, Velikovsky was solely concerned with the planets Venus, Mars and (in an unpublished manuscript) Saturn on unusual orbits, not with Planet X."

FT376:67: Sharon Hill of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, notes that the Supreme Court of the US is typically referred to as SCOTUS, not SOCUS.

FT377:23: Neil Woolley emailed to point up an error in our follow-up coverage of the Croydon Cat Killer, pointing out that Brighton is part of the unitary authority of the city of Brighton and Hove. Prior to that it was in East Sussex, but it has never been in West Sussex.

FT377:55: Alan Noble of Dublin corrected a biblical error in Alan Murdie's Forum on parapsychology: the reference given in footnote 10 should be 2 Corinthians 3:6 (not 1 Corinthians 11:25).

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

GATEWAY TO HELL?

Hundreds of 'witch's marks' intended to ward off evil have been hiding in plain site at Creswell Crags



ABOVE LEFT: The caves at Creswell Crags. ABOVE RIGHT: Some examples of the remarkable collection of apotropaic marks recently recognised in the caves.

Apotropaic or protective marks have recently been recognised in caves at Creswell Crags on the Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire border. (The word apotropaic comes from the Greek *apotrepein*, "to turn away"). The scale and variety of the find is unprecedented. The marks include double Vs, believed to signify the Virgin Mary (Virgin of Virgins), PM (Pace Maria), crosses – and diagonal lines, boxes and mazes, thought to be symbols for capturing or trapping evil. They appear to have been added to over time. That may indicate the desire to strengthen protection against evil spirits in response to death, unexpected sickness and poor crops. Hundreds of marks were found in just one of the caves, which also contains Britain's earliest cave art: 13,000-year-old pictures of birds, deer, bison and horses.

Tentatively scheduled to be deemed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2020, Creswell Crags is a half-kilometre-long enclosed limestone gorge at the beginning of a complex cave system. The caves have evidence of Neanderthal presence between 60,000 and 50,000 years ago; brief episodes of occupation in the Upper Palaeolithic, specifically a very brief Gravettian occupation around 28,000 years ago; and a significant use of all the major caves during the Final Magdalenian between 12,500 and 12,200 years ago. The evidence for the latter is so rich at Creswell that the prehistorian Dorothy Garrod coined the term 'Creswellian' for the British Magdalenian in her survey of the British Upper Palaeolithic in 1926.

The marks were identified by Hayley Clark and Ed Waters

from Subterranea Britannica, a charity whose members have a passion for underground space, during a cave tour last year. They were noticed before, but had been dismissed as insignificant Victorian graffiti scratched before the caves were barred to the public. Legend has it that one of the caves once provided a hideout for Robin Hood.

One particularly frenzied collection of marks was carved around a 4ft (1.2m) round hole at the back of a cave. John Charlesworth, the caves' heritage interpreter, said: "The people who made the marks may have thought the big hole was some kind of door to the underworld or even a demon prison, but they were certainly worried about what was going to come out of it. You could think of the witch marks as worry lines that demonstrate the anxieties of the time. These

marks are a kind of folk magic and the hole in the ground may have represented some kind of Pandora's Box. These witches' marks were in plain sight all the time. Being present at the moment their true significance was revealed will stay with me forever."

Alison Fearn of Leicester University, who studied protective marks for her PHD, said: "I cannot emphasise how important this corpus of apotropaia is to graffiti research. I think off the top of my head, it is the largest number of examples found anywhere and in any context in the UK." Protection marks are most commonly found in mediæval churches and houses, near entrance points –doorways, windows and fireplaces. They persisted until the early 19th century. *BBC News*, *Sky News*, 15 Feb; *iflscience.com*, 18 Feb 2019.



TENTACLE TALES

Octopuses from outer space... and on drugs

PAGE 10



PLASMA PUZZLE

Russia's mysterious 'Dome of Light'

PAGE 14



ZAMBIAN TERROR

Murderous African ghost photographed

PAGE 25

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Will the Orwellian-sounding Alternative Influence Network turn you into a conspiracy theorist, or have academics studying YouTube got their algorithms in a twist asks **NOEL ROONEY**

DOWN THE YOUTUBE

Is YouTube turning people into conspiracy theorists? Despite the company's assurances that it vets such content, and some recent high-profile banning of figures like Alex Jones, there is some evidence to suggest (and some concomitant apocalyptic shudders from the liberal wing of academia) that the algorithmic editorial strategies employed by online alternative media platforms ('Up Next', 'Recommended for you', etc) may actually be leading viewers towards, rather than away from, the murkier fringes of political discourse; and that fringe is regularly identified by academia as the very environmental niche that is occupied by conspiracy theorists. This is often true, of course, but not always; and it serves no useful purpose, academically or politically, to lump all the 'things I don't like' into a single, amorphous blob of opprobrium.

Buzzfeed did some testing on YouTube 'Up Next' recommendations earlier this year. Starting from a news piece about a spat between Donald Trump and Nancy Pelosi, the algorithm took only nine clicks to get to a QAnon video piece. Well, you might think that's a bit more than six degrees of separation, but research suggests that a large part of the audience, particularly those under 30, regularly chain through this many, or more, recommendations, and doesn't switch off when the going gets weird. The implication is that a large proportion of YouTube's audience is likely to be exposed to alt-right and conspiracy content even if their original aim was just to watch the news. On the other hand, a news piece about the Donald and the Wall quite quickly diverted viewers to a warren of videos about the wacky things that happen in airports, so the news isn't all tragic. *Motherboard*, an online magazine that is part of the *Vice* network, recently posted an article exploring how viewer influence on content producers can shift them towards offering conspiracy-based, or politically radical, material, to

widen their audience. The suggestion is that fringe content is a successful marketing strategy for content producers but, coupled with YouTube's click-through algorithms, can lead unsuspecting viewers into strange and occasionally politically uncomfortable (for these researchers at least) territory.

Rebecca Lewis, in an article for *Data and Society*, identifies a group of people and web sources she calls the Alternative Influence Network: a rag-tag bunch of alt-right personalities with a covert agenda. She suggests that viewers and content producers alike can be persuaded to view and broadcast more specific (and often more extreme) content through influencing the algorithms of media platforms with multiple likes and recommendations. By presenting this material in a light-hearted way, or presenting it as intellectual debate, the AIN can introduce more people to ideas and opinions not aired in the mainstream.

So, are we all being dragged off to Hell in an emoticon-adorned handbasket? I'm not convinced. In the first place, much of the research is biased in a couple of ways: it's predisposed to see conspiracy theory as a Bad Thing; and it's ideologically opposed to much of the content it researches. It also attributes a great deal of power to both the alt-right and the algorithmic magnets of the online behemoths, to the point where researchers seem to say that it is impossible for most mere browsing mortals to resist them. This attribution of overwhelming power to 'Them' is often, ironically, used as an identifier for conspiracy theorists. And I'm not sure that the assumption (true or not) that most people are stupid is a sound basis for any kind of discourse, academic or otherwise. https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/yw83eg/how-youtube-drives-shane-dawson-and-other-creators-to-conspiracy-theories; www.buzzfeednews.com/article/carolineodonovan/down-youtubes-recommendation-rabbithole; https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DS_Alternative_Influence.pdf

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ARMED POLICE RESCUE GERBIL

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 23 Jan 2019.

Caught on video: knife-wielding, rum-guzzling monkey in rooftop standoff in Brazil

Huffington Post, 19 Feb 2016.

ROMAN GODDESS RISES FROM MARGARINE TUB

Times, 12 Dec 2018.

Zeus and Centaur announce new jobs

Irish Independent, 8 June 2018.

ANXIOUS AND LONELY PEOPLE LIKELY TO SUFFER PHANTOM TEXT MESSAGES

D.Telegraph, 5 Feb 2016.

Planes plan to take-off

Daily Star, 30 Oct 2018.

CAT ISLAND

Aoshima, also known as 'Neko no shima', or 'Cat Island', is an island in Ehime Prefecture, Japan, which is known for its large number of felines, which now outnumber humans by approximately 10 to one. The cats were introduced to combat rodents on ships in the area, but remained on the island and reproduced in large numbers. Estimates place the current population at around 200 cats compared to a human population of just nine. As in many rural areas of Japan, large numbers of residents have left the community to seek better job prospects in cities and the people now remaining, and feeding the cats, are all pensioners. **PHOTOS: CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES**





SIDELINES...

FISH FALL

About 100 fish of a species known locally as 'Gidasalu' fell from the sky on 17 December during a rainstorm in India's coastal Andhra region as cyclone Phethai made landfall nearby. Phone footage by residents of Amalapuram shows the fish wriggling around in puddles. *unexplained-mysteries.com*, 28 Dec 2018.

ICE BOMBS

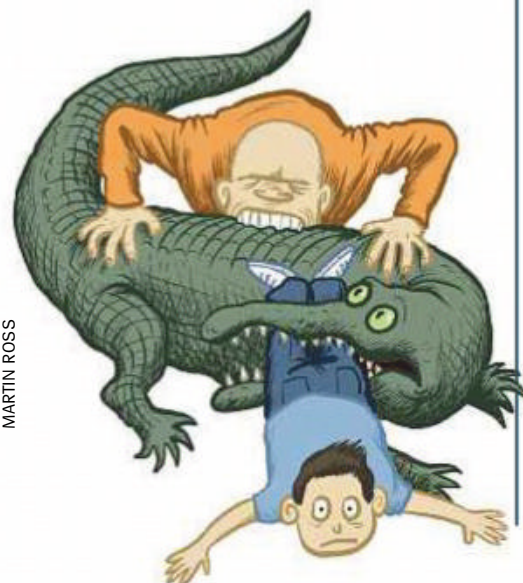
On 16 September, an ice block crashed through the roof of a bungalow near Tonbridge in Kent, leaving a large hole. Another bungalow was holed by ice on 29 September, this time in Cramond, an Edinburgh suburb. The hole in the tiles was a metre square. On 3 November, a large ice boulder crashed through the flat roof of a house in Lockleaze, Bristol. While watching TV around 10.15pm, Jamie Shean heard an "explosion" and found several football-sized lumps of ice on and near his bed. *edinburghnews.com*, 4 Oct; *D.Mail*, 6 Oct; *mirror.co.uk*, 6 Nov 2018.

RECORD YEAR

According to the Official Loch Ness Monster Sightings Register, 2018 was the best year this century for Nessie sightings – 13 in all. One was by writer Ricky D Phillips, who described a creature with a 4ft (1.2m) neck and a head the size of a rugby ball. *D.Star*, 19 Dec; *Sun*, 22 Dec 2018.

BITING BACK

Tejada Abulhasan jumped into a river and bit a crocodile that had his 12-year-old son Diego in its jaws. He savaged the animal "like a Rottweiler" after it dragged Diego under the water while he was swimming near the family home in Balabac in the Philippines on 26 January. Diego escaped with a few scars. *Metro*, 30 Jan 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

DEEDS OF EVIL | The Devil finds work for idle hands to do, from ritual murder to mobile phone use



ALEXANDER NEMENOV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Patriarch Kiril uses the trusty 'crossed candles' method to thwart hellish modern tech. **BELOW:** The Quispe siblings killed their mother as a Satanic sacrifice.

TOOL OF THE ANTICHRIST

Speaking to Rossiya 1, Russian state TV, on 7 January (Russian Orthodox Christmas), the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church said smartphone users should be careful of the "worldwide web of gadgets". Patriarch Kirill startled his audience by announcing: "The Antichrist is the person who will be at the head of the worldwide web, controlling all of humankind. Every time you use your gadget, whether you like it or not, whether you turn on your location or not, somebody can find out exactly where you are, exactly what your interests are and exactly what you are scared of. If not today, then tomorrow methods and technology could appear that will not just provide access to all information but will also allow the use of this information. Do you imagine what power will be concentrated in the hands

of those who gain knowledge about what is going on in the world? Such control from one place forebodes the coming of the Antichrist... There shouldn't be a single centre, at least not in the foreseeable future, if we don't want to bring on the apocalypse." He said that the "devil acts very wisely" in offering people such a "toy". *BBC News*, *coasttocoastam.com*, 8 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 9 Jan 2019.

DEMONS MADE ME DO IT

Teodora Quispe Ccayllahua, a Peruvian woman, was killed by her children – Aurelia Quispe, 38, Percy Quispe, 41 and Marcelina Suane, 46. Aurelia told police she was "chosen" to carry out the sacrificial killing by the "master of darkness" and admitted convincing her siblings to join in. She was instructed to bathe in her mother's blood, "invoking the devil". Ccayllahua's body was found inside her house in the mountainous village of Andabamba in northern Peru on 14 July 2018, with some of her organs missing, including her intestines. Aurelia gouged out her mother's eyes before the group dumped her cut-out organs in a nearby pond. "The master of darkness ordered me, the king of demons is already with us, we are more and every day we will become bigger," said the crazed Aurelia upon her arrest. *elPopular*. *rt.com*, 18 July 2018.

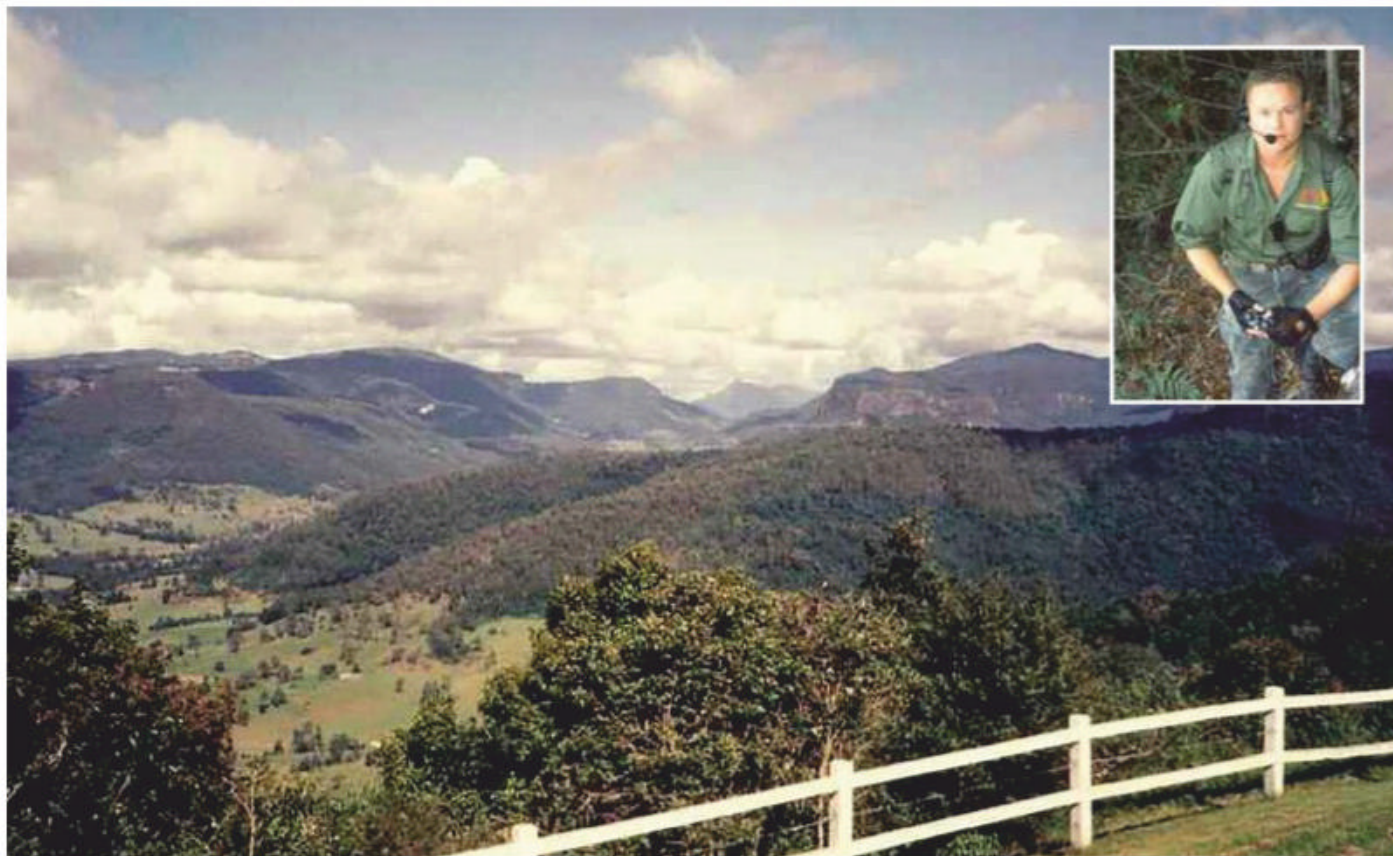
SATAN'S SCHOOLGIRLS

Two schoolgirls aged 11 and 12 plotted to kill their classmates, dismember them, and drink their blood before committing suicide. The girls, from Bartow Middle School in Florida, were found with four knives, a goblet and a pizza cutter. According to local police, their plan "was to kill at least one student but they were hoping to kill anywhere from 15-25 students... in hopes it would make them worse sinners, ensuring that after they killed themselves... [they] would go to hell so they could be with Satan." *Independent*, *Huffington Post*, 25 Oct 2018.





ZOWIE, A YOWIE! | The hairy monster menaces a delivery driver in latest Gold Coast encounter



ABOVE: A view of the wooded mountains of the Gold Coast hinterland from Beechmont Road, where Gary the truckie had his terrifying encounter. **BELOW:** Gary's sketch of the angry Yowie's attack on his vehicle. **INSET:** Yowie hunter Dean Harrison.

Around 10am one morning last November, a delivery driver identified only as Gary was driving along Beechmont Road in the bushy Gold Coast hinterland of Queensland when he rounded a sharp right bend at Witheren and slammed on his brakes. Out of the corner of his eye, he had spotted what he thought was a boulder tumbling down a steep slope and onto the road – but then he saw it was a massive creature. It unfurled huge, hairy limbs and stood upright before locking eyes with him through the truck's windscreen. "It wasn't a rock at all," Gary told Yowie hunter Dean Harrison. "This thing scared the absolute crap out of me."

It was a towering beast, its navel level with the truck's bonnet 6ft (1.8m) off the ground. Gary reckons it weighed close to 880lb (400kg). At first it seemed somehow shocked or embarrassed that it had been seen, but then it got angry. "He slapped or punched the centre of the bonnet of my truck," said Gary. "It was like I had hit a small car. He was so tall, he had to reach down to hit the truck. Just before he hit the truck, he grunted."



It wasn't a scream or a cry or a howl, but a loud grunt. He was hairy, he had hair probably two inches long all over his body... He had a round face, like a chimpanzee." While Gary was still trying to make sense of what he was seeing, the creature turned and vanished into the bush.

Yowie sightings in the region peaked in 1977-78. In October 1977, about 20 school students, on a camp at Springbrook, reported seeing a Yowie twice and measuring its footprints. The Kuku Yalanji tribe of far north Queensland claims to have coexisted with the Yowie for centuries; they have a long and detailed history of Yowie attacks in their legends. According to the news reports for this latest sighting, the

first 'official' Yowie report was made in Sydney in 1790. Dean Harrison is sure the Yovies are out there, having tracked scores of sightings across Australia for the past 20 years. He said he has twice been attacked by a Yowie. The Blue Mountains in New South Wales are a hotspot for reported Yowie sightings, followed by the Sunshine and Gold coasts in Queensland. Reported sightings have also increased recently in Western Australia around the Mandurah area. [*Australian Associated Press*] portstephensexaminer.com.au, (*Queensland*) *Courier Mail*, 24 Jan 2019.

For more on the subject see *"The Yowie: In Search of Australia's Bigfoot"* by Tony Healy and Paul Cropper (Anomalist Books, 2006).

SIDELINES...

FALSE POSITIVES

Dasha Fincher, 41, spent three months in jail after her bag of cotton candy (candyfloss) was mistaken for methamphetamine by police in Georgia owing to a defective drug test. Busted at a traffic stop on New Year's Eve 2016, she was held in custody because she couldn't afford her £780,000 bond. She is suing the two arresting officers and the test manufacturer Sirchie for damages. According to the *Washington Post*, roadside tests have identified cookies, mints, deodorant and tea as controlled drugs. *BBC News*, 29 Nov 2018.

LONELIEST DUCK

Last January, a mallard dubbed "the loneliest duck in the world" appeared on the remote Pacific island of Niue, a nation of 1,600 souls. The coral atoll, 1,750 miles (2,820km) from New Zealand, has no wetlands or ponds, so 'Trevor' (named after New Zealand MP Trevor Mallard) lived in a puddle. The fire brigade regularly added water and locals provide food. Had Trevor been blown in on a storm, or arrived by boat? Sadly, he died after being attacked by dogs. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 8 Sept 2018; *BBC News*, 28 Jan 2019.

DAY OF THE LOCUST

A locust 10cm (4in) long appeared in Andrew's Wood near Loddiswell in Devon last October. It is the first recorded in the county, and only the 10th in England and Wales. It might have blown in from southern Europe, or arrived as a stowaway. Meanwhile in Surrey, a gardener observed a 4cm (1.6in) mole cricket, a native of Italy, leap from the roots of a golden bamboo plant. *Times*, 24 Oct 2018.

THE FLIP SIDE

Scientists at Oxford believe dark energy and dark matter are a single phenomenon – an invisible fluid (analogous to Einstein's maligned "cosmological constant") that acts like a field of negative gravity. The new model was published in the *Journal of Astronomy and Astrophysics*. "If real," said Dr Jamie Farnes, "it would suggest that the missing 95 per cent of the cosmos had an aesthetic solution: we had forgotten to include a simple minus sign." *D.Telegraph*, 6 Dec 2018.



SIDELINES...

BOTHERED BEAVER

A 35-year-old homeless man was observed having sex with a dying beaver that had been struck by a car near Kennewick, Washington. Searched by police, the unnamed man was found in possession of methamphetamine. *iflscience.com*, 7 Sept 2018.

ALL OVER FOR ROVER?

Someone reported a “stranded Great Dane” on the flat roof of the Elm Pentecostal Church in Port Talbot, South Wales, fearing it was dying because it wasn’t moving. An RSPCA inspector climbed up by ladder and discovered it was a 4ft (1.2m) stuffed toy. *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 9 Nov 2018.

SPACE TREES

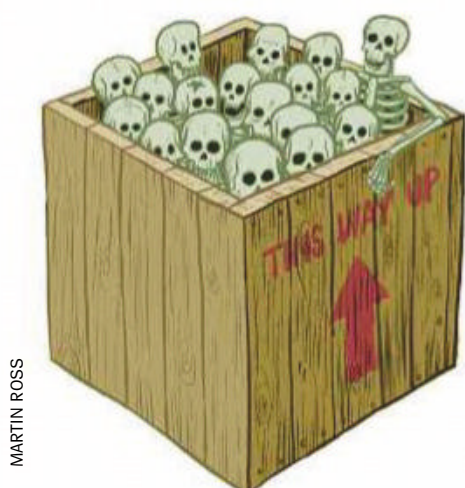
Last autumn, homes were being sought for eight apple tree saplings grown from seeds taken aboard the International Space Station by Tim Peake. Each had been cultivated from pips taken from the tree that allegedly inspired Newton’s work on gravity. *D.Telegraph*, 12 Sept 2018.

WHITE PORPOISE

During a wildlife-watching sea trip last August, Duncan and Hannah Jones of Marine Discovery Penzance saw something “white and luminous”. It was a rare white porpoise. *D.Telegraph*, 20 Aug 2018.

DEM BONES

Indian railway police arrested a “corpse smuggler” and recovered the equivalent of 50 human skeletons at Capra railway station in the eastern state of Bihar. The man, Sanjay Prasad, was part of a gang that supplied “tantriks and occultists” in China and Bhutan, police said, adding that there was “huge demand for skeletons among medical students in China”. *D.Telegraph*, 1 Dec 2018.



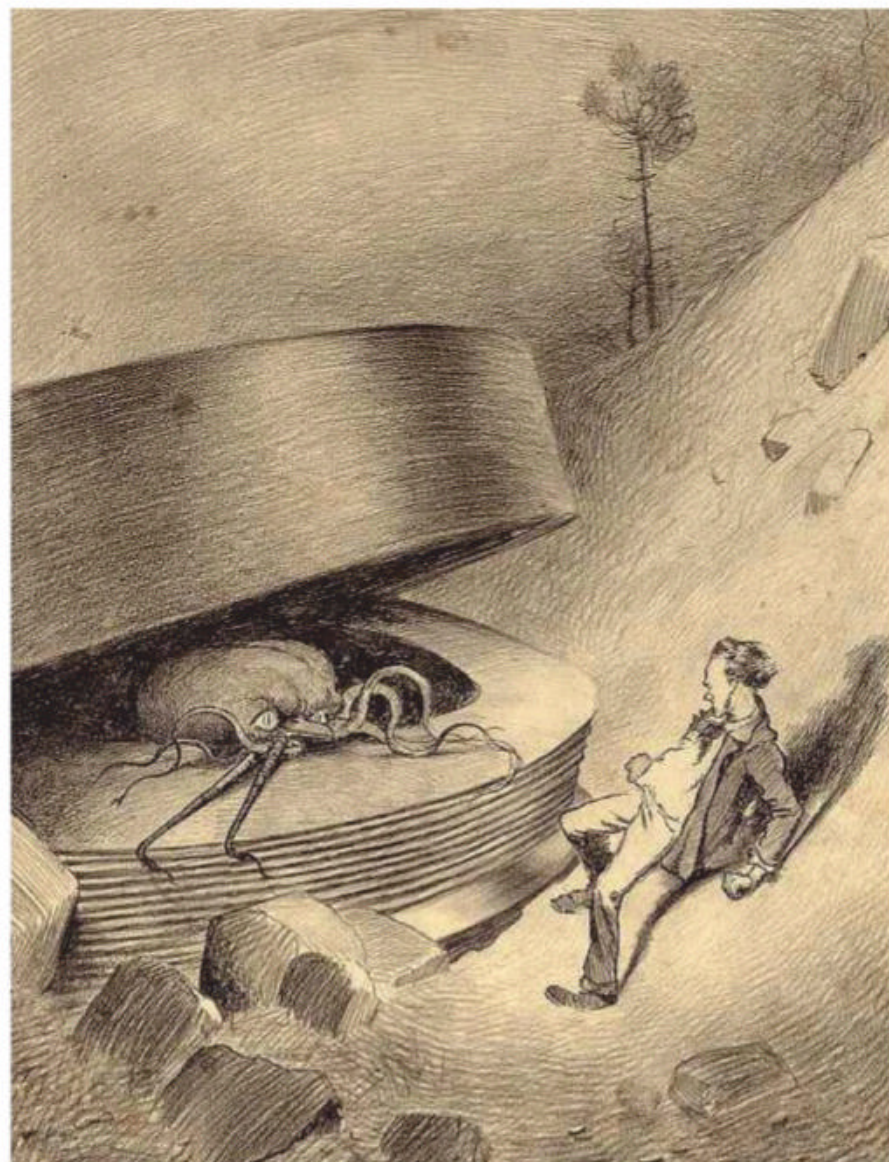
MARTIN ROSS

TENTACLE TALES | Octopuses on ecstasy, on the road, and possibly even from outer space...

- At about 5.15pm on 5 February, police were called to the A381 between Malborough and South Milton in Devon, where they found a car upside-down in a ditch. The 49-year-old driver, who was from Salcombe, told them he had swerved “to avoid an octopus”. As they found no evidence of an octopus on the road, the driver was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of drugs. “He did a bit of a slow roll into a ditch,” said a police spokeswoman. “An ambulance went out and the driver was checked over by paramedics but there weren’t injuries enough to go to hospital.” Octopuses are not unheard of in the seas off the south coast of England, but this particular cephalopod would have had to crawl more than 3 miles (5km) over hills and fields to find itself in the path of a car on the A381. *BBC News*, 6 Feb; *Evening Standard*, 6 Feb 2019.

- Octopuses are very strange creatures – but could they actually come from another world? A controversial scientific paper argues just that, suggesting that they may have arrived on our planet as panspermia – frozen eggs carried here in comets. The claim was made in a report entitled “Cause of Cambrian Explosion – Terrestrial or Cosmic?” co-authored by a group of 33 scientists (some with reputations as mavericks) and published last year in the journal *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology*.

The paper suggests that the explanation for the sudden flourishing of life during the Cambrian era – often referred to as the Cambrian Explosion – lies in space, as a result of the Earth being bombarded by clouds of organic molecules. But the scientists go on to make an extraordinary claim concerning octopuses, which seem to have evolved on Earth quite rapidly around 270 million years ago, 250 million years after the Cambrian explosion.



HERITAGE AUCTIONS

ABOVE: One of HG Wells’s octopus-like Martians. FACING PAGE: A California two-spot octopus – after a dose of MDMA they became playful and touchy-feely.

Octopuses may have arrived on our planet as frozen eggs carried in comets

The paper states: “The genome of the Octopus shows a staggering level of complexity with 33,000 protein-coding genes more than is present in *Homo sapiens*. Its large brain and sophisticated nervous system, camera-like eyes, flexible body, instantaneous camouflage via the ability to switch colour and shape are just a few of the striking features that appear suddenly on the evolutionary scene. The transformative genes

leading from the consensus ancestral Nautilus to the common Cuttlefish to Squid to the common Octopus are not easily to be found in any pre-existing life form – it is plausible then to suggest they seem to be borrowed from a far distant ‘future’ in terms of terrestrial evolution, or more realistically from the cosmos at large. One plausible explanation, in our view, is that the new genes are likely new extraterrestrial imports to Earth – most plausibly as an already coherent group of functioning genes within (say) cryopreserved and matrix protected fertilised Octopus eggs. Thus the possibility that cryopreserved Squid and/or Octopus eggs arrived in icy bolides several hundred million years ago should not be discounted as that would be a parsimonious cosmic



explanation for the Octopus's sudden emergence on Earth circa 270 million years ago."

Indeed, octopuses have frequently been touted as a possible model for extraterrestrial beings. In *War of The Worlds* (1898), HG Wells conceived his Martians as octopus-like creatures with massive brains; and the 2016 film *Arrival* concerns first contact with an alien cephalopod race.

Octopuses appear to have evolved surprising rapidly. One study has suggested they are capable of observational learning – that is, learning by observing others. They have been spotted assembling discarded coconut shells and using them to construct a shelter. In *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea and the Deep Origins of Consciousness* (2017), Peter Godfrey-Smith wrote: "If we can make contact with cephalopods as sentient beings, it is not because of a shared history, not because of kinship, but because evolution built minds twice over. This is probably the closest we will come to meeting an intelligent alien." *express.co.uk*, 14 May; *Yahoo News UK*, 15 May 2018.

- The drug MDMA, (aka Ecstasy) commonly makes people feel very happy, extraverted, and particularly interested in physical touch. Might it have a similar effect on octopuses?

When scientists recently gave MDMA to California two-spot octopuses inside laboratory tanks, the results were "unbelievable". Their study was published in *Current Biology* (20 Sept 2018).

Rather than one localised brain with a cortex, an octopus's decentralised nervous system includes control centres for each arm in addition to a brain. Gül Dölen and her colleague Eric Edsinger wondered whether the chemistry behind human social behaviour – the system controlling the serotonin molecule – also existed in the solitary, asocial octopus. They found that octopuses do have genes that seem to code for serotonin transporters, proteins responsible for moving

serotonin molecules into brain cells. Serotonin is the molecule generally considered to be responsible for feeling good. When humans take MDMA, it binds to serotonin transporter proteins and changes the way serotonin travels between brain cells, probably producing the warm and fuzzy high and perhaps the increased extraversion that the drug is known for.

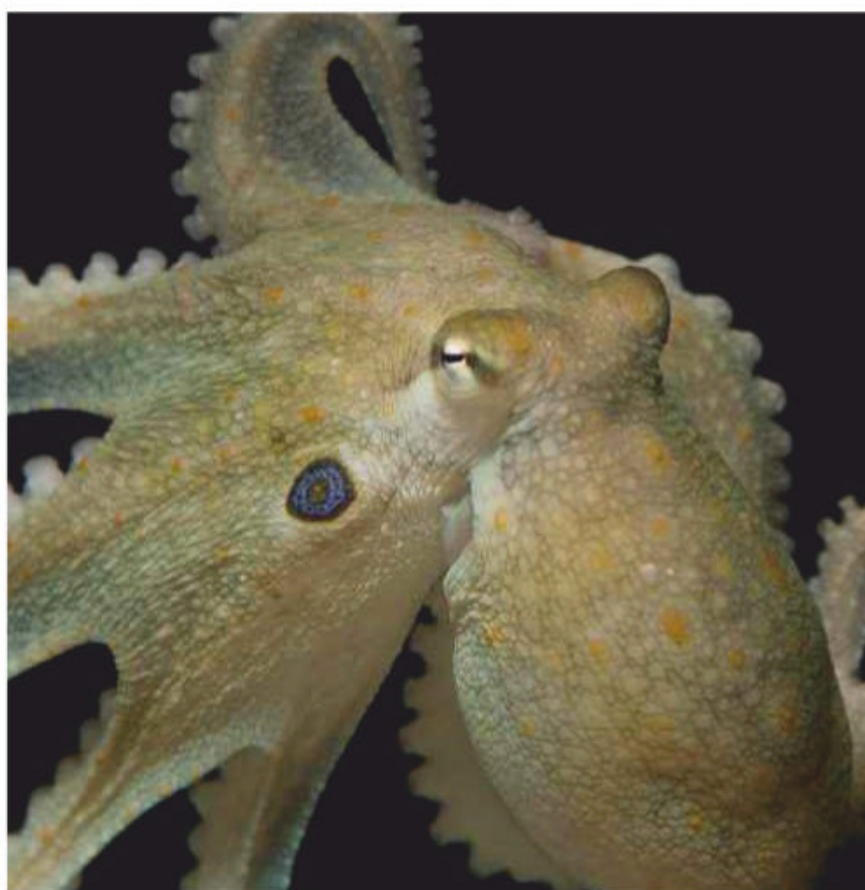
Dölen and Edsinger built a tank with three connected chambers and put five octopuses individually into the middle chamber. Another chamber housed an octopus (male or female) stuck in an overturned plastic basket and the third had an object unfamiliar to the creatures, such as a toy. The researchers then measured how long each animal spent in the company of its peer and how long it spent with the toy.

When the octopuses were sober, they were more likely to socialise with the other octopus (compared to exploring the toy) when the octopus was female, regardless of the subject's own sex. The second time in the tank, the animals were dunked in an MDMA solution that allowed them to absorb the drug through their gills. The first dose was too high and the octopuses "freaked out and did all these colour changes." Once the proper dosage was found,

the researchers were able to notice definite differences before and after MDMA.

Without MDMA, the octopuses would approach their caged colleague cautiously. When on E, they became all touchy-feely. "They're basically hugging the [cage] and exposing parts of their body that they don't normally expose to another octopus," said Dölen. "Some were being very playful, doing water acrobatics or spent time fondling the airstone [aquarium bubbler]." The unusual physical contact between the octopuses "appeared exploratory, not aggressive in nature".

There are limitations to the study, of course. Dölen pointed out that a larger sample size was needed to show differences between how males and females react to MDMA. She'd like to further test the changes in behaviour, as well as what happens if the serotonin transmitter is blocked before the MDMA is administered. Such a test would convince Dölen that she was really seeing the affects of MDMA on serotonin transporters. She also wanted to test whether the drug would have different effects on octopuses of varying ages, or whether an octopus's upbringing changed its sociality. *Gizmodo.com*, *huffingtonpost.com*, 20 Sept; *Times*, *Guardian*, 21 Sept 2018.



THOMAS KLEINDINST / PHYS.ORG

SIDELINES...

BALLS-UP

Two-year-old Eric Nica was supposed to be having a routine op on 17 December to treat his left undescended testicle; but surgeons in Bristol damaged his healthy right testicle by mistake, leaving him effectively castrated. Around one per cent of boys need treatment for undescended testicles; otherwise they risk infertility and cancer. *Sun*, 22 Dec; *Sunday People*, 23 Dec 2018.

PEACOCK ADVENTURE

Pea, a peacock belonging to Rene and Brian Johnson in Springfield, Vermont, ran off with a flock of turkeys. Six weeks later, on 21 November, the Johnsons posted a message on Facebook saying: "Do you have any suggestions on how to catch the little twerp?" *[AP]* 23 Nov 2018.

EXOTIC BACK STORY

Bettina Rodriguez Aguilera, 59, a Miami city councillor and Republican Congressional candidate, claims that when she was seven, blond Christ-like aliens took her on board a UFO, where she learned that Africa was the energy centre of the world, that a cave in Malta hid 30,000 non-human skulls, and that the famous coral castle in South Florida is actually an ancient Egyptian pyramid. Since then, she has remained telepathically in touch with aliens. *Miami Herald*, 16 Oct 2017; *New Scientist*, 8 Sept 2018.

MONSTER RAT

Pest controller Terry Walker and his dog Max caught a giant rat behind shops in Bournemouth, Dorset. It was 21in (53cm) long and weighed 23oz (650g), about twice as big as a normal rat. "A few years ago the average length was maybe 14 inches," said Mr Walker. "They are definitely getting bigger." *D.Mail*, 20 Nov 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

MOOSE CALL

Kyle Stultz thought maybe it was kids playing “ding dong ditch” when his doorbell in Anchorage, Alaska, rang in the middle of the night, and there was no one outside. Then he checked his security camera. The video showed a large moose backing its caboose right into the doorbell. [AP] 7 Dec 2018.

THE CROWS’ FEAT

Six specially trained crows have been put to work picking up cigarette butts and rubbish at the Puy du Fou park in the western Vendée region of France. The birds are rewarded with a nugget of bird food delivered from a small box each time they deposit a cigarette end or small piece of rubbish. They can fill a bucket with rubbish in under 45 minutes. [AFP] 10 Aug 2018.

REPELLANT TOO EFFECTIVE

Staff at Surat Thani oyster farm and hotel in Thailand sprayed the whole place with a mixture of oil and diesel in a bid to keep away mosquitoes. On 21 September 2018 a spark set the property on fire. No one was injured, but everything was reduced to a smoking ruin. *Thaivisa.com*, 23 Sept 2018.

GECKO CALLING

A spate of nuisance calls emanating from the Ke Kai Ola marine mammal hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii, had an unlikely cause. Hospital director Claire Simeone was one of many who received silent calls from the centre, which she eventually traced to a gecko perched on a touch screen telephone. Every time it moved, it dialled numbers stored in the recent calls log. *New Scientist*, 20 Oct 2018.

DUBIOUS PROBABILITIES

In August, amateur golfer Ali Gibb, 51, scored three holes-in-one in five hours while playing 36 holes for a charity golf tournament in Croydon, south London, which she won. Then on 25 September, at Richmond Golf Club in south-west London, Wayne Eagling scored a hole-in-one, followed immediately by his partner Peter Orton, into the same hole. In the first case, the chances were said to be more than 1.9 trillion to one; in the second, 17 million to one. *D.Mirror*, 17 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, 27 Sept 2018.

MARONITE MIRACLES | Mysterious oil oozings in Lebanon and Australia...



PHOTOS: PATRICK BAZ / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Lebanese Christians pray prior to a procession in the town of Annaya, Lebanon, on 22 February 2016, marking the 23rd anniversary of the healing of Nohad al-Shami, a miracle attributed to St Charbel. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Gilbert Abou Zeid flashes a tattoo depicting Saint Charbel at his sportswear store in Beirut. **BELOW:** Miraculous oil on the walls of the Tannous house.

Strange things happen to Nohad al-Shami. In 1993 her painting of St Charbel began oozing oil. Around the same time the long-dead saint appeared in her dreams. “I have come to operate on you,” he said. And so he did, curing her of hemiplegia (paralysis of half the body), she claims. At the mountaintop monastery of Annaya, in north-west Lebanon, a Mass is said every month to mark the miracle, and to pray for new ones. “The blind see and the disabled walk,” said Mrs al-Shami.

Miracles are on the rise in Lebanon, according to Father Louis Matar, a Maronite priest. St Charbel Makhoul (1828-98), the closest thing Lebanon has to a patron saint, gets most of the credit, having notched up 26,000 miracles since his death. After slowing down at the start of this century, he has regained his form. “We are seeing more miracles in these past two years than we have in the past decade,” said Father Matar.

Polls show religious faith is declining in Lebanon, especially among the young, but many people still wear amulets to ward off evil spirits and visit faith healers when they are sick. Miracles were often reported during Lebanon’s civil war on 1975-90, and its war with Israel

in 2006. Saints even get special protection under the law; mock one and you risk jail time. Last July, after news spread that St Charbel had helped a woman conceive, police interrogated two men who suggested that the saint had slept with the woman.

One story claims: “A few months after [St Charbel’s] death, a bright light was seen surrounding his tomb and the superiors opened it to find his body still intact. Since that day, a blood-like liquid flows from his body. Experts and doctors

were unable to give medical explanations for the incorruptibility and flexibility.” In 1950 and 1952, his tomb was opened and his body supposedly still had the appearance of a living one. According to the

Catholic Tradition website, Father Joseph Mahfouz, the postulator of the cause, certified that in 1965 the body of Saint Charbel was still preserved intact with no alteration. In 1976 he again witnessed the opening of the grave; this time the body was completely decomposed. Only the skeleton remained. We are not told how this dramatic alteration was interpreted.

Charbel is an equal opportunity saint: about one in 10 of his miracles heals a Muslim or a Jew, says Father Matar.

However, the saint has been caught up in the sectarianism that poisons Lebanese politics. Though the tourist trade is struggling, officials are loath to publicise his acts, which might attract more visitors. “We cannot possibly promote the miracle of a Christian saint or any other religion,” said the tourism minister. “It would upset other sects.” *Economist*, 15 Dec 2018.

- The walls of a house in Guildford, a western suburb of Sydney, are said to be seeping miraculous oil with divine healing powers. The ‘miracle’ began more than a decade ago – and according to a string of Facebook posts, has now grown to include remarkable formations of ash, incense, religious symbols and even engraved dates. Father Michael Haykal said scores flock to witness what they believe are divine signs. He said the phenomena are “beyond science”. Maronite Christians George and Lina Tannous, who own the house having moved from Lebanon in the 1990s, claim it’s all down to the spirit of their late son Mike, who was killed in a car crash in 2006. Father Haykal said the oil had helped women fall pregnant after doctors told them they couldn’t conceive. (*Sydney*), *D.Telegraph*, 11 Aug 2018.



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Great balls of light!

DAVID HAMBLING investigates Russia's mysterious 'Dome of Light' – could it be a secret weapon?

Rocket launches can produce weird aerial phenomena and UFO sightings – but according to a recent report, the effects around a 1988 Russian launch baffled even US military intelligence. There are suggestions of a Soviet secret weapon, known as the 'Dome of Light'. But what was it – and what does it mean for the new nuclear arms race?

One of the more easily explained incidents was described by Phil Plait in *Slate* magazine: "Rising over the horizon is a huge circle of light, a glowing smoke ring that gets bigger as it moves silently across the starry vault. After several minutes, growing the whole time, it finally dips below the far horizon, leaving you stunned and wondering if you've lost your mind."

This phenomenon may be witnessed by thousands of people and extensively photographed. One incident caused widespread alarm in Norway in 2009, others were seen in Hawaii in 2011, 2013 and 2014, and in Russia in 2017. Photographs of this most recent event showed giant glowing orbs many miles across against the backdrop of an auroral display. All of these events gave rise to UFO reports, but all could be unequivocally attributed to missile tests taking place at the exact times of the sightings. In the vacuum of space, rocket exhaust expands outwards rapidly, forming an enormous bubble. In the right lighting, specifically when the observer is in darkness but the bubble is high enough to catch the sun's rays, the bubble becomes an eerie, palely glowing sphere.

In 1988, the crew of a US Air Force RC-135 Cobra Ball reconnaissance aircraft witnessed something rather different. The aircraft was on a mission to record the scheduled launch of a Soviet SS-20 missile. This was being expended as part of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty: rather than breaking missiles up, the Russians were permitted to test-fire them into the sea, giving them useful information about the missile's performance. By observing the event, the Americans hoped to learn about the missile's capabilities.

"We noticed what appeared to be a translucent, milky white wall moving from the left, over the USSR, to the right, toward the Northern Pacific Ocean," Air Force pilot Robert Hopkins told *TheDrive.com*. "It covered the entire sky from ground level to as far up as we could see looking out the front windows of the



airplane. It moved very quickly – far faster than crossing airplane traffic – and rapidly approached us."

The wall of light passed at an estimated 6,200mph (10,000km/h), disappearing eastwards and leaving darkness behind it. Both pilots witnessed the effect. They also saw a similar wall of light during a later SS-20 launch observation mission. The impression was that the wall was not reflecting sunlight but was self-luminous.

Analysts at the USAF's Foreign Technology Division were divided on what the wall of light was. Some thought it was caused by something in the first-stage fuel of the SS-20, others suggested it was produced deliberately – and not necessarily by the SS-20 itself – to dazzle US observation satellites.

A *Los Angeles Times* piece from January 1988 had mentioned talk in defence circles of a new Russian 'Dome of Light' weapon to mask nuclear missile launches and effectively counter America's proposed Star War anti-missile systems. The Dome of Light was also mentioned by name in a 1988 military magazine as a "temporary ABM [anti-ballistic missile] effect" to shield missile launches. A 1988 article in science magazine *Omni* went off the deep end. They quoted Tom Bearden, a former lieutenant colonel and fringe science enthusiast, who claimed the Dome of Light was one of many 'scalar weapons' derived from Nikola Tesla's work. It supposedly combined gravitational and electromagnetic effects using physics unknown in the West. [For Bearden's off-the-wall speculations back in 1978 about orthogonal rotations, cattle mutilation, etc, see **FT25:49-50, 26:14-20**].

More support for the Dome of Light came from a decidedly bizarre source. The Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult [see **FT84:9**] believed in the potential of scalar weapons; cult leader Shoko Asahara claimed they were described in the Book

LEFT: A huge ball of light photographed over the Yamal Peninsula, Siberia, in 2017.

of Revelation. Aum Shinrikyo scientists apparently worked on such devices, and allegedly tested them in West Australia. In May 1993 "a large hemisphere of orange light, lined with a silverish glow" was seen over Banjarn sheep station. This may have been the result of a meteor, but according to esoteric writer YC Shimatsu it was a Tesla shield, "a large electromagnetic standing wave that can protect a city or military base against missile and bomb attacks."

The Russian military poured some \$500m into scalar weapons, but a review by the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1991 concluded that the entire area was a pseudoscientific scam and terminated the programme. No scalar weapon has ever been demonstrated.

Perhaps more relevantly, the Russians worked on more orthodox plasma weapons. They went so far as to experiment with 'plasmoids', stable balls of glowing plasma produced at high altitude by high-power microwaves – similar to the artificial aurora that the US HAARP facility can produce. These were thought to have some potential for countering missiles or satellites. The USAF has recently shown an interest in this area, with plans announced in 2016 for microsatellites to release 'plasma bombs' in space, supposedly to smooth out solar winds that affect communications.

Given the right additive, a rocket exhaust could generate plasma, creating a faintly glowing shell, which might look similar to the Dome of Light. In theory, the charged particles moving at high speed might temporally disrupt electronics and blind a satellite, though there is no evidence that the Cobra Ball flights suffered any malfunctions. (The technique might have still been under development, or it might have only been tested with a low-intensity mixture, the equivalent of the missile's dummy warheads.)

There is no hard evidence that the Dome of Light was more than a concept. But if the Cobra Ball report is accurate, it may have been much more. The concern is that a fully developed Dome of Light could be deployed. This could be a destabilising element in any game of nuclear brinkmanship, as it increases the temptation to carry out a nuclear first strike.



FOOD FADS

Do you take sand in your tea? Plus the hidden dangers of Liquorice Allsorts, odd obsessions with Frosties and Marmite, and the ice cream and sausages diet...



ABOVE LEFT: Graham Arnott is obsessed with Marmite. ABOVE RIGHT: Keith Ballantine passes on the Liquorice Allsorts. BELOW: Anne Osborne eats nothing but fruit.

• Keith Ballantine, 68, an ex-nurse from Worcester, gorged on so many Liquorice Allsorts his system went into meltdown. "I'd eat a whole packet in one sitting," he said. "I ended up having a bit of an upset tummy and a week later I was struggling to get out of bed." His body mistook the sweets for an infection, producing antibodies that led to nerve disease. He lost all use of his limbs and spent three months in hospital. He was eventually diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome. He was discharged in a wheelchair in December 2012. It took another four months of therapy before he could walk again.

David Braham, 40, a driving instructor from Bridgend, South Wales, is another victim of Guillain-Barré syndrome. On 6 April 2018, he ate a curry from a roadside café and developed the immune system disorder. He was paralysed from the nose down and could only move his eyes. He was put in a coma for a month and on a ventilator for four months. He took his first steps in November and hopes to finish rehab in March this year. *Sun, D.Star, D.Mail, 10 April 2014; Sun, Metro, 13 Dec 2018.*

• A 56-year-old woman ate liquorice sweets every day as they were on "special offer" at her local shop. She was admitted to St Vincent's



Hospital in Dublin with acute "thunderclap headache", nausea and high blood pressure. She also reported seeing "zig-zag lines and then more vivid colours" in her right visual field. While in the emergency department, she had a seizure lasting 60 seconds. She was diagnosed with posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome (PRES), and was advised to lay off the liquorice. *Irish Journal of Medical Science, via Irish Times, 18 Feb 2015.*

• Like Shelley McClellan [FT362:6], social worker Graham Arnott, 52, from Harrow, north-west London, is obsessed with Marmite and has

the salty, yeasty spread with every meal, even on his sprouts at Christmas. His kitchen and bedroom are filled with £1,500 of Marmite memorabilia, including banners, clocks, tea towels, special plaques, and 200 Marmite jars from around the world. "From being a very young boy I ate Marmite nearly every day," he said. "It's just something that I've always really loved and appreciated and after finding fellow Marmite lovers online I decided to start my collection. My partner Lucy thinks I'm barking mad for the amount I collect but I enjoy it." In 2007, Stephen Guinness, 21, had eaten *nothing but* Marmite since he was two years old – hard to credit [FT239:9]. *D.Express, 7 Dec 2017.*

• Talent scout Colin Evans, 56, of Leytonstone, east London, was rushed to hospital after collapsing from sepsis and slipped into a three-week coma. When he came round he was gripped by a desire for Frosties, the Kelloggs sugar-coated breakfast cereal he had not eaten since childhood. Now he gets through a box every two days, even sprinkling them on curry. "I don't know if something in my brain changed that affected my tastes, but since I woke up all I wanted was Frosties," he said. "When I was in hospital I would snack on them all the time and now I

have them about 10 times a day. I just really like the crunchiness and it gives me the urge to get up and do things." *Sun, 16 Jan 2019.*

• After a session of hypnotherapy, teaching assistant Courtney Baxter, 21, from Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, who had eaten only ice cream and sausages since she was a baby, was finally cured of a selective eating disorder that made her physically sick just looking at fruit and vegetables. "My partner of seven years and I have never been on a date," she said. *D.Mirror, 14 Nov 2018.*

• Anne Osborne, 52, from Queensland, has eaten nothing but fruit for the last 27 years. Each meal is one whole, raw, fruit – a mango, banana or apple. Her strict fruitarian diet has had no adverse impact on her health and she is an ideal weight. She has even raised her two children, now 27 and 14, on the same diet. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph, 27 Oct 2018.*

• Hans Raj, 45, loves eating bricks and claims never to have suffered any ill health. "I have been eating bricks and rocks for 25 years," said the stonemason from Uttar Pradesh in India. "I love the taste of gravel and have sand with tea and even soup." *Sun, 10 Feb 2019.*

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN and THEO PAIJMANS round up the weirdest news items from across Europe...

PUMA OR PANTHER?

There were several more sightings of the ‘Olgiate puma’ (see **FT375:23**) in the Lake Como area of Italy in January 2019, where a black panther was also reported.

On the morning of 10 January, a 35-year-old man from Concagno spotted a puma with a yellow tinge to its fur crossing the road to Malnate. However, a woman also saw the big cat, at the cemetery of Cagno, near Santo Stefano, and was sure it was a black panther. A police spokesperson said that “the woman was still very frightened and explained that she had seen it from a distance of about three metres [10ft]: a black cat with yellow eyes. She was quite certain.”

On the evening of 6 January, a large black cat had also been spotted by a woman from Binago; the day after, however, a lady in Gaggino saw a light-coloured puma.

On 17 January, at 10pm, the puma (which one report suggested “seems to be becoming a sort of psychosis”) was observed by a woman near Valmorea. She gave no description. An hour later, 26-year-old Matteo Pelliccia “was looking around as my neighbours told me to be careful because they had read on the Internet that the famous puma was around. I saw it in the middle of the fields. It licked a leg and had a very long tail, and I noticed the legs were those of a puma, but I do not know the fur colour because it was dark.” Other witnesses confirmed the sighting with their own reports but later wrote they had been mistaken.

On 19 January, the panther appeared again, and “was seen by an entire family in the fields behind the hotel restaurant Cascina Canova.” Says Vanda Vanotti: “We all went to the window, my brother-in-law, my children and my nephew...



ABOVE: There have been many recent sightings of the ‘Olgiate puma’... which now seems to have morphed into a ‘black panther’ and made its first kill.

and although it was about 200 metres [60ft] from our house we saw a black shape moving smoothly like a feline – an animal that was bigger than a dog.” Finally, the first kill of the yellow puma/black panther was reported at the end of the month. A young man found a bone about a metre in length in the forest between Cagno and Concagno. The carabinieri took the material away to be analysed. *La Provincia di Como*, 11+12+19+20+26 Jan 2019.

RETURN PARCEL

A parcel sent from Kentucky, USA, to Australia was delivered to a post office in Austria. The Austrian postman returned the parcel to the sender in the States only to find the American mail had again send it to Austria, a few weeks later. All in all, Austrian newspapers report, the parcel crossed the Atlantic at least five times, flying a distance of over 70,000km (43,500 miles). One Austrian postman, obviously at his wit’s end, wrote “Again!”

on the parcel. Newspapers said that instead of sending it back to the US, the Austrian post had finally decided to redirect it to Australia. *Der Standard [Vienna]*, 26 Nov 2018.

HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

On 27 November 2018, a municipal worker knelt at the cemetery fence at Steinfeld, Lower-Saxony, Germany, and was feeling for a tool when he suddenly felt something grab his hand. Looking up, he saw that a wolf had his hand in its mouth. With great presence of mind, he struck the wolf’s paw with a hammer and managed to escape. It is the first recorded wolf bite in Germany in 150 years. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 1 Dec 2018.

ITALY’S ALIEN BASE...

The Centro Ufologico Mediterraneo (Mediterranean UFO Centre) circulated a report on social media in January claiming that there was an alien base in northern Italy. After stating that UFOs had

been spotted from Valtellina in the north to Sicily in the south, with the last observation of a large luminous sphere on 2 January at Teglio and Lanzada in Valmalenco, the group declared: “Valmalenco could be described, without exaggeration, as the Italian Essdalen [an area in Norway known for sightings of strange lights]. And from this area we even have testimonies of very close encounters with strange non-human beings. Is it possible that there is an alien base in Valmalenco, a hypothesis which is supported by many enigmatic events that are truly inexplicable? We definitely cannot rule it out!” *La Provincia di Como*, 9 Jan 2019.

...AND ANOTHER IN SPAIN

Spain is also an unwitting host to an alien base – at least according to the YouTube channel *Verdad Oculta* (Hidden Truth), which boasts some 700,000 subscribers. In late January, a group of friends claimed that their drone filmed an unknown object exiting ‘la Grieta’, a large cavern in the Leza Valley, La Rioja, Spain. An investigation by Nacho Rojo of *Verdad Oculta*, equipped with two infrared cameras and accompanied by the group that had filmed the luminous object, apparently yielded more footage. On one occasion it captured an aircraft and a UFO that was flying at much higher speed and showing “a constant light and without the trail left by the aircraft”. Other luminous objects ascending the grotto at high speeds were captured on film as well.

“It was not just a UFO, but two, and they crossed in the sky. They are anomalies that shine like stars on a linear flight path, but they are not aircraft”, concluded Rojo, who at that time announced that “the best is yet to come”. On the basis of this investigation,



Roja proclaimed the existence of an alien base in the cavern, stating: “Our research suggests that this place is really extraordinary.” The footage, at the time of writing, had clocked nearly a million views and can be examined at the *Verdad Oculta* YouTube channel. *www.nuevecuatrouno.com*, 29 Jan, 12+16 Feb 2019.

NUDE IN THE NIGHT

On 27 September 2018, several pupils on a school trip became panicky on a night hike after they saw “a naked lady” in a forest in Hagen, Germany. After some of the children started to hyperventilate, police and firefighters searched the area, but found nothing. *Die Rheinpfalz*, 28 Sept 2018.

MYSTERY FLIGHT

Sometime around 21/22 November 2018, a private plane crashed in a mountain near the hamlet of Valdecebro, in Teruel, Spain, possibly in an attempt to land on an old Civil War landing strip. The wreck was discovered at 11am on 22 November, when a man working in the area spotted the plane, which had caught fire on impact – but there was no trace of the occupants: “When landing, it must have struck a steel tow that was anchored to two supports and that crossed the runway, shattering the landing gear of the plane, which crashed to the ground out of control.”

Police were trying to clarify the circumstances of the accident, to identify the aircraft, and determine where it came from and who was in it – so far to no avail. “Two basic possibilities would explain the missing occupants: that whoever was in the plane was injured, left to try to find safety and failed to reach an inhabited area; or that there was a voluntary flight for reasons related to an illegal practice... The point of impact is a mountain located very close to the industrial airport of Teruel.” *ABC [Spain]*, 23 Nov 2018.

STRANGE LIGHTS AND GRASS CIRCLES

Residents of Heukelom, a village in Brabant in the Netherlands, claimed to have seen a strange, extremely fast-moving green light over a nearby pasture on the evening of 8 January. Lobke van Rijsewijk, one of the eyewitnesses, described it as “not just a light from a plane or a Chinese lantern. It was the sudden and fast movements that we could not identify.” About two weeks after the sighting, Anneke Vugs, another resident of Heukelom, discovered two large black circles in her pasture. “One of my friends suggested that the grass could have been burned by someone, as a prank. I immediately went to take a look, but no, the circles were not burned. The grass appeared to have darkened all by itself”, she told the local weekly paper. The cause of the strange light and the darkened grass circles, though, proved to be mundane: it turned out the local carnival association had hoaxed the eyewitness account and it had also made the circles. *De Schakel, Weekblad voor Berkel-Elschot en Heukelom*, 6 Feb 2019.

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE 1

Two cases of ball lightning were reported from Germany during the hot summer of 2018. In June, a “brilliant ball” strike

left a hole in the pavement and vanished into a river bed in Schwarzenberg, Saxony. Witness Doris Seidel said she was “absolutely terrified” by the event.

On the evening of 28 July, Brunhilde and Dietmar Glöckner were sitting in their living room in Dessau-Kochstedt during a heavy thunderstorm when they observed a blue-white ball of light approaching them from their garden. It was larger than a football and flew at a height of about 2.5m (8ft) before suddenly exploding with a loud bang. Absolute silence followed, and the light ball had disappeared completely. The couple believed they had been struck by lightning, as all the fuses were blown. “It cannot have been an ordinary lightning flash, as there were no traces of burns anywhere.” While the phenomenon lasted, their TV set stopped working. Nine households in that part of town reported damaged telecommunication devices, a clear indication that a lightning strike had taken place. *Freie Presse, Chemnitz*, 15 June, 27 Nov; *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 1 Aug 2018.

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE 2

An unusually destructive ball lightning incident was reported from the city of Hoozeveen, in Friesland, the Netherlands, in May last year. During a

thunderstorm, ball lightning and a loud explosion startled residents in the Wolfsbos area. “We had our doors open and many people were still sitting in the garden. We saw an enormous fireball, followed by an ear-splitting crash. We have never experienced anything like it – it was like a rocket strike,” local resident Anne Kuipers told a newspaper reporter. The ball lightning caused considerable damage, she said: “The thermostats of the central heating are in disarray, televisions are damaged beyond repair and Internet routers are broken.” *Hoozeveensche Courant*, 31 May 2018.

ROOS ON THE RUN

Sometimes, kangaroos escape from a zoo and cannot be caught; sometimes, they are seen – or even caught – but are not missing.

Eddy the kangaroo escaped from the Ströhen Animal Park in August 2018 and was spotted several times but evaded capture. In early September, another kangaroo was seen by many independent witnesses near Hellmonsödt, Upper Austria; this time, nobody reported a missing kangaroo.

On 1 September, seven kangaroos broke out of their compound in Hohne, near Celle, in Germany. Six were quickly caught – but one, nicknamed Sidney, remained at liberty and was seen by several motorists over the next two days. Sidney was caught by the police on 3 September in the village of Helmerkamp, “after a brief period of resistance,” and reunited with his owner. The last roo escaped from an animal park at Brüggen, near the German-Dutch border, on 2 September and took up residence in the nearby Brächter Forest. It had fled after a dentist had treated the animals. At the time of the press reports, the roo was still in hiding, occasionally being observed by walkers. *Radio Westfalica*, 17 Aug; *Augsburger Allgemeine, NDR.de*, 3 Sept; *RP.online*, 6 Sept 2018.



ABOVE: The strange circles in Heukelom turned out to have a mundane origin.



PAUL SIEVEKING digs up the latest discoveries, including skeletons with severed hands and feet

BURIED PYRAMID

At the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union on 12 December, scientists presented evidence of an enormous pyramid-like structure on top of Mount Padang in west Java, the remains of an ancient temple hidden underground for thousands of years. The structure is topped by rows of ancient stone pillars discovered in the early 19th century. Scientists have found that the sloping 'hill' underneath isn't part of the natural, rocky landscape, but man-made. Though the buried structure may superficially resemble a pyramid, it differs from similar Mayan pyramids (for example), which tend to be symmetrical. This structure is elongated, apparently fronted by a semicircle.

Using an array of techniques to peer underground – including ground-penetrating radar surveys, X-ray tomography, 2D and 3D imaging, core drilling, and excavations – the researchers uncovered several layers of a sizable structure, spread over an area of around 37 acres (15ha) and built up over millennia.

At the very top were basalt pillars framing step terraces, with other arrangements of rock columns forming walls, paths and spaces, estimated to be about 3,000 to 3,500 years old. Underneath the surface, to a depth of about 10ft (3m), was a second layer of similar rock columns, thought to be 7,500 to 8,300 years old. A third layer, extending 49ft (15m) below the surface, is more than 9,000 years old; it could even date to 28,000 years ago, according to the researchers. Their surveys also detected multiple chambers underground. Today, local people still use the exposed site at the top for prayer and meditation, which could also be how it was used thousands of years ago. *livescience.com*, 17 Dec 2018.



ABOVE: The top of Mount Padang, Java, possible site of a pyramid-like structure hidden underground for millennia. BELOW: The handless skeleton uncovered on the outcrop of Chapelle Dom Hue off Guernsey.

BAFFLING BURIALS

The mystery surrounding Chapelle Dom Hue, a tiny outcrop off Guernsey, where a porpoise was carefully buried in a 15th century grave cut into the bedrock [FT361:12], has deepened after the skeleton of a handless figure – possibly a monk or a drowned person – was unearthed about 10m (33ft) away. The body was oriented roughly east to west, suggesting a Christian burial. Copper and bone buttons were found, possibly indicating the body was clothed. Assumed to be male, the person was just 5ft tall and the skull badly damaged. "He is lacking hands and wrist bones, which is mysterious," said archaeologist Philip de Jersey. "There are medical reasons a person could lose their hands, such as leprosy, but the toes are in such good condition it seems unlikely. It may be that it was a body that

had been floating around and the hands had been nibbled. The feet might have had footwear and so have been protected." *Guardian*, 22 Nov 2018.

- Roadworks for the N60 Oran scheme in Co Roscommon, Ireland, unearthed two "enclosure sites". Michael Stanley, an archaeologist for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), said: "The people who created the enclosures appear to have piled the material excavated from the deep ditches to form a bank on the outside, rather than on the inside. This suggests a prehistoric date and ceremonial function. However, a human skeleton, with its severed foot placed between its legs, was discovered at the base of one of the ditches and scientific dating is awaited to help try and solve this mystery." *irishexaminer.com*, 28 Dec 2018.

- Seventeen of the 52 skeletons unearthed from a Roman burial ground at Great Whelnetham, near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, were decapitated. Skeletons with their skulls placed between their legs included men, women and two 10-year-old children. Decapitation was a widely practised burial rite in Roman Britain, to ensure that the dead would not haunt the living. "The incisions through the neck were post mortem and were neatly placed just behind the jaw," said archaeologist Andrew Peachey. "An execution would cut lower through the neck and with violent force, and this is not present anywhere. This appears to be a funeral rite that may be associated with a particular group... possibly a cult or a practice that came with a group that moved into the area." *D.Telegraph, Metro*, 9 Jan 2019.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

234: CLASSICAL CRAZIES

“When I see myself... losing irregularities of conduct, and approaching the irreproachable, with advancing age, I see that what is ennobling us is senility... Year after year I am becoming nobler and nobler. If I can live to be decrepit enough I shall be a saint” – Fort, *Books*, pp.877-8.

Although Alois Alzheimer’s first diagnosis occurred in 1906, the notion of senile dementia goes back to Greece and Rome, as well illustrated by NC Bechtold & CVV Cotman’s ‘Evolution in the conceptualization of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease: Greco-Roman period to the 1960s,’ *Neurobiological Aging* 1998, 173-89 – online. For the subject at large, see WV Harris (ed.), *Mental Disorder in the Classical World* (2013).

Greek and Roman writers – e.g. Hippocrates and Pythagoras in Greece, Cicero (*De Senectute*) and Seneca in Rome – realised the possible mental consequences of old age, the latter observing that “old age is the best time of all, provided the mind is unimpaired.” The Hippocratic corpus (not all written by the Master himself) has much on madness, introducing such later notions as influence of the Moon on behaviour. The other great doctor, Galen, coined the word *Morosis* to define the obliteration of memory in some elderly victims. Most of our relevant vocabulary is classically derived. Obvious examples include Dementia, Insanity, Lunatic, Maniac, Moron, and Idiot. The Greeks inevitably had a goddess, Lyssa, with attendants Maniæ, as prime movers; Romans personified (e.g.) *Furor*, *Ira*, *Rabies*.

In his play *Herakles Mad*, Euripides has the hapless hero slaughter wife and children. Sophocles’s *Ajax* has his protagonist massacre sheep under the delusion that they were his rival Greek chieftains. These are fiction-cum-legend, but show the extent of recognition of the real-life horrors of insanity.

A fragment of Euripides’s lost *Telephus* contains the aphorism, “Old Men are twice children,” pointing the way to senility. The same sentiment is echoed in *Hamlet* (Act 2 Scene 2), while in his famous Seven Ages of Man soliloquy (*As You Like It*, Act 2 Scene 7), Shakespeare makes Jacques conclude “Old age is a time of second childishness and mere oblivion.”

Greek, Roman, and Byzantine authors provide cases both of collective madness



(cf. Fort, *passim*, for such outbreaks) and individual dossiers. Both Lucian (*How to Write History*, ch1) and fourth-century AD historian Eunapius (frag. 48.1) describe how the population of Abdera (a city commonly equated with idiocy) was driven by an epidemic of madness that caused them in physical and mental fever endlessly to quote verses from Euripides’s *Andromeda*, lasting from high summer until winter, when cold weather restored sanity.

Jesus (Mark 5. 1-13; Matthew 8. 32, Luke 8. 33) had a handy cure. On meeting a fellow possessed of demons – when asked his name, he replied, “Legion, for we are many” – who was haunting graveyards and self-mutilating with stones, JC simply transferred them into 2,000 Gadarene swine who rushed to the sea and collectively drowned themselves.

Horace’s schoolmaster Orbilius, nicknamed *plagosus* (stripey) for his love of flogging, author of a book on the lunacy of teachers, almost reached his century but “had long before lost his memory,” being mocked in a poet’s line “Where is Oribilius, pray, great learning’s tomb?”

Another scholar-teacher, Didymos Chalkenteros (‘Brazen-Gut’), had written so many books (3,500-4,000, on ancient estimates, this hyper-impressive *oeuvre* almost entirely lost) that eventually he could not remember what he’d written, thereby earning a new nickname, ‘Book-Forgetter’. (All right, I know what you’re thinking about me)

Suetonius (chs50-1) calls only one Roman emperor ‘insane’: Caligula (above), furnishing numerous anecdotes of his bizarre behaviour. Roman gossip attributed his condition to being driven mad by an aphrodisiac slipped to him by wife Cæsonia – Jerome has the same story about poet Lucretius, thus inspiring

Tennyson’s wild poem. Discarding the quaint Victorianism ‘Brain-Fever’, modern diagnoses include encephalitis, epilepsy, hyperthyroidism, and meningitis. A further line of research, not restricted to Caligula, is ergotism and cognate results of allergies and diet, propounded by Mary Matossian, *Poisons of the Past* (1990).

Robert Graves’s Claudius novels (and the BBC’s *I, Claudius*) simultaneously gave that emperor an overdue favourable assessment and a whitewashing of his many atrocities and peculiarities. Suetonius and Tacitus portray him as unbalanced to a degree, e.g. asking why wife Messalina was not at dinner after he’d just had her executed, likewise wondering why people recently liquidated did not answer his invitations. His reign was ridiculed in an anonymous lampoon ‘The Apotheosis of Morons’, also in the extant companion ‘Pumpkinification of Claudius’ – I am alone in the world in thinking it not written by Seneca (*Phoenix* 18, 1964, 39-48, online).

The most extreme and pitiable dossier – somewhat prefiguring ‘The Madness of George the Third’ belongs to Byzantine emperor Justin II (565-74). Recognising his mental problems were severe and worsening, he abdicated the throne. According to contemporary John of Ephesus (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk3 chs1-3), Justin was diverted by being pushed around the palace in a child’s cart with organ music – his own request – blasting through the palace, having to be forcibly restrained from jumping from the roof to his death, also from attacking his attendants, some of which he bit and – shades of Hannibal Lector – two of which he supposedly ate.

Around the same period began a series of Byzantine ‘Holy Fools’ who roamed around in their own idiosyncratic worshipping of Christ – shades of The Beatles’ ‘Fool on the Hill’ and The Who’s ‘Happy Jack’. Most notorious was Symeon of Emesa (6th-century) whose antics included dragging around a dead dog from a dunghill, disrupting church services by throwing nuts and snuffing out candles, and vandalising pastry shops.

“I now have a theory that our existence, as a whole, is an organism that is very old – a globular thing within a starry shell, afloat in a super-existence... and that we partake of, and are ruled by, its permeating senility” – Fort, p877.



Afterlife through a lens

ALAN MURDIE questions the usefulness of CCTV footage in providing 'evidence' of the paranormal

At one time CCTV promised much for the ghost hunter. In *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide* (1973) Andrew Green wrote: "Ideal equipment... would be closed-circuit television". For many it still does, with curious images recorded on camera amounting to proof of life after death for some believers.

Once considered prohibitively expensive, cameras and transmitting sets with digital recording apparatus are now affordable in the paraphernalia deployed by many ghost hunting groups, as well as being routinely used in public places, commercial premises and in private dwellings by security conscious householders. Anomalous images recorded via CCTV are being increasingly labelled as evidence of ghostly activity in Britain and the United States. Recent examples in the news include: 'Terrifying ghost caught on CCTV haunting family home' (*Daily Express*, 6 Mar 2018); 'Frightened family spooked by ghost may move house over eerie images caught on CCTV' (*D.Mirror*, 30 Aug 2018); 'Security officer thought he'd spotted a ghost – when he checked the CCTV he was horrified' (*Daily Star*, 27 Sept 2018), and an unrelenting flow of similar such stories all derived from some apparent anomaly captured on CCTV.

In January 2019 Jennifer Hodge, 57, of Atlanta, Georgia, received international attention for her posting on social media of what she believes to be a post-mortem image of her son Robbie picked up on a home security camera after a sensor was triggered in her kitchen. At the time, Jennifer was in bed watching a TV serial with her daughter Lauren, 21, when a notification appeared on her phone reading "person spotted in entryway". She heard Lauren call out, "Mum there's a person in the kitchen... Mum that's Robbie!"

Jennifer wrote: "When we pulled up the image this is what we saw... For everyone who knows what my son looks like, they know that this looks just like him beard and all! When I went to the kitchen the nest camera was in flip out mode... I thought it was broken, simply a strange night at the Hodge house, to say the least."

From Jennifer's brief description and the arresting image – unlike so many, it is broadly recognisable as a human shape – an intriguing story was built. Jennifer is convinced the image is of her dead son Robbie who succumbed to a drug overdose and was laid to rest in 2016. She stated:



ABOVE LEFT: CCTV footage from a home security camera in the Atlanta kitchen of Jennifer Hodge.

ABOVE RIGHT: Mrs Hodge was sure that the 'ghost' of her son Robbie was visible in the image.



KENNEDY NEWS AND MEDIA

"When I went to the kitchen the nest camera was in flip out mode... I thought it was broken"

"We have no clue what to think about all of this but so happy to be able to know my beautiful boy is always with us!" and "...this offers hope for so many..." (*D.Mail*, 14 Jan; *D.Mirror*, 15 Jan; *Fox News*, 16 Jan 2019 and many others).

It will be noticed at once how radically this account departs from the classic apparitional experiences recorded in the last quarter of the 19th century (see, for example, F Myers, E Gurney, F Podmore: *Phantasms of the Living*, 1886). In those, the appearance was frequently the recognisable form of a relative or friend making a brief nocturnal appearance in the bedroom of the surprised or alarmed witness before vanishing. After a night disturbed by doubts, the perplexed percipients relayed their encounters to others, or recorded the details in letters or diaries, providing some measure of corroboration as to the date and time. Sometime afterwards news would be

received confirming the unexpected death of the person who had manifested as an apparition coinciding in time with the sighting. Alternatively, where the person had been dead for some while, some hitherto unknown detail would be divulged by the vision and subsequently confirmed through further enquiry.

How very different this is from the ghosts claimed as appearing on CCTV today. The glow of television set or computer has banished spectres from the bedroom; to get attention from the living, apparitions are perforce required to appear on screen. Andy Warhol's prediction of everyone becoming famous for 15 minutes is vindicated by such posthumous appearances when these accounts become international news; far more people have now heard of Robert Hodge than when he lived. Increasingly, seeing a ghost is no longer a direct and meaningful personal experience but a second-hand one obtained via a screen image.

In my view, such images are nowhere near as important or valuable as what a human percipient may tell one about an experience of directly seeing – or apparently seeing – a ghost or some other entity. We have more purported images of ghosts captured on camera than ever before, yet we are learning nothing new whatsoever

about this age-old phenomenon.

Photographs and film evidence are rarely wholly conclusive in themselves. Camera evidence should not be considered the best evidence for ghosts since it cannot be questioned like a human witness. The truthfulness and accuracy of the image relayed by camera cannot be tested by cross-examination, where assessment of credibility that comes from a witness's demeanour is lost.

Fortean Times long ago pointed out that mere possession of an image should not be taken as establishing proof in itself of any paranormality. A photograph or an image obtained on video or via television is second-hand, effectively a form of hearsay evidence (though one long admitted in legal proceedings as a form of documentary or material evidence). When supplied in a legal context, images can be partial, ambiguous, distorted and open to editing, doctored or manipulated. Consequently, authentication, details of the photographer and specialist analysis of the camera and the resultant image may all be necessary.

As was observed in *R v Masquid Ali; R v Ashiq Hussain* [1966] 1 Q.B. 688: "For many years now photographs have been admissible in evidence on proof that they are relevant to the issues involved in the case and that the prints are taken from negatives that are untouched... In saying this we must not be taken as saying that such recordings are admissible whatever the circumstances."

There are very good reasons for this. Far from it being the case that 'the camera never lies', it frequently does. Distortion of living human bodies by photography by way of angles, lighting and filters is easy to achieve. A pertinent warning to lawyers was issued in the *Law Society Gazette* a few years ago about photographs of living human bodies in personal injury cases:

"Subject distance, lens choice and camera settings all play a major part in photographic reproduction and can have a large effect on how any injury is portrayed... The brief is therefore decided by the photographer who is effectively deciding on how much of the body to include in the frame." (Tim Zoltie, 14 April 2014).

If this can be done with clinical evidence, how much more complex the issues showing a purported spirit body?

Unravelling the truth about a technical recording is difficult. Lacking from the story of the ghost of Robbie Hodge is a technical assessment of the CCTV unit and telephone concerned upon which corroboration depends.

With a CCTV recording, the following are desired: (i) the make and type of CCTV equipment (ii) evidence establishing the CCTV was operating properly at the material

time, or (if not), that any malfunction was not of a character to affect the accuracy of its recording and the production of any images (iii) an analysis of the image to see if it departs in any measurable way from what is considered a normal image (iv) evidence from a person responsible for the operation of the CCTV (e.g. with checking, testing, maintenance etc) that it was working correctly. The history of the system may also be relevant; obviously a professionally installed system may be deemed more reliable than one constructed and installed by an enthusiastic amateur. With the case of the Atlanta revenant, beyond the name of the CCTV system this type of information is absent.

Those blessed with a memory of ghost hunting before the millennium may recall similarity with a case in the UK in April 1999, involving the anomalous image of a male figure captured on CCTV in the reception area of the offices of a company at Moor Lane Mill, Lancashire. Two security guards first noticed a motionless figure on a monitor. It stayed still for over five minutes. Concerned that it might be a person who had been taken ill, one guard went to investigate. He found no one, yet the image remained on screen for several minutes, though the guard watching had not seen his colleague appear on screen with it. The second guard then checked reception area in person, again finding no intruder, whilst the first guard continued to see the same figure appearing on a monitor. The form remained visible for several more minutes before abruptly vanishing.

Local enquiries by a company employee gathered information from a former worker

at the site during the 1960s and 1970s. Allegedly, staff had experienced a variety of unusual events including apparitions, mysterious voices, and anomalous mechanical malfunctions.

This all seemed promising. The Society for Psychical Research was called in, and two investigators viewed the film and made further enquiries. Crucially, specialist opinions were obtained from CCTV companies. These revealed the probable cause of the mysterious image was a loss of camera signal. One effect of digital processing with the type of camera was that if the video signal failed, the last image was retained in a 'frozen' state. This could happen during a power breakdown, through camera disconnection or removal of the video lead. When this happened, an alert message would appear to warn users.

Manufacturers of the system confirmed this. The system installed at Moor Lane Mill had displayed an alert, the words 'power loss' being visible on the screen. It was surmised that power was restored, when the camera angle changed, replacing the 'frozen' image with a real-time video signal from the camera, causing the form to 'vanish'.

Regrettably, it was not possible to test this hypothesis on the equipment at Moor Lane, this explanation satisfying company bosses that a power failure and not a ghost was responsible for the ghostly image.

Could a technical malfunction lie behind the image from Atlanta? It would be possible to interpret certain phrases by Jennifer Hodge as indicative that the CCTV equipment was not working properly that night, for instance her remark: "The nest



ABOVE: Moor Lane Mill, Lancashire, where in 1999 an anomalous figure was caught on CCTV.



GHOSTWATCH

camera was in flip out mode... I thought it was broken, simply a strange night at the Hodge house, to say the least." One may note that prior to her own recognition of the figure as Robbie she may also have been influenced by the prior statement of her daughter.

Trying to identify any apparition as a particular deceased individual is difficult. It was hoped as long ago as 1885 that "The fact that almost everybody is now photographed ought to be of material assistance in obtaining evidence of this latter kind." ('Phantasms of the Dead' *Proceedings of the SPR*, v.3, 1885) but this expectation has never been realised. Many claimed apparitions are unknown and destined to remain so; often appearances are so brief and unsubstantial, amounting to little more than the suggestion of a figure.

A further difficulty for investigators arises with the degree of emotional investment that the recently bereaved may confer upon such recordings. Having viewed a great many alleged ghost photographs, I can say it is impossible to determine in many cases whether the image represents anyone or anything identifiable at all.

This is not to suggest that deliberate fraud or hoaxing is involved, or even conscious deception of any kind. Most people who believe such pictures may constitute evidence of spirits are wholly sincere. Unexplained images are embraced as disclosures from the spirit world, providing a glimpse into a realm beyond death in which their loved one survives. They constitute a material point where their private mental worlds encounter infinity. The emphasis placed on alleged photographs by some ghost hunters only encourages and hardens such attitudes. However, it should not always be thought that such presumed intrusions from the afterlife would be welcome.

The fixation with photographs now frequently marginalises human testimony. For example, ambiguous CCTV film obtained at the *Bottle of Sauce* pub in Albion Street, Cheltenham, claimed to show the ghost of a boy and became a local news story; but the fact that one manager, James Punch, "has seen the ghost several times over the years and now says 'Goodnight little boy' each time he shuts up shop" was relegated to the end of the article (*Gloucestershire Echo/Gloucestershire Live*, 31 Oct 2018).

More widely, the psychology of perception and experience is immensely complicated. I remember a discussion in Cambridge with veteran ghost hunter Tony Cornell (1923-2010) of the SPR and Cambridge University Psychical Research Society on technical approaches to verifying ghost experiences and his



ABOVE: Security footage from the Bottle of Sauce pub in Cheltenham supposedly shows the ghostly figure of a young boy who has haunted the pub for some years.

resigned disappointment at the failure of equipment to record, over many years, what witnesses were reporting seeing in haunted houses. He had witnessed many strange phenomena himself, but had become personally sceptical that paranormal phenomena could be recorded on camera, save for those involving physical phenomena. And here as well there was the malfunction problem of 'shyness' that bedevils certain technical investigation attempts. Equipment could be used to eliminate certain normal causes of alleged phenomena but efforts to capture positive proof could be frustrated. As Andrew Green advised: "Be prepared, therefore, for spending perhaps an hour on wiring up and sealing off an affected room, and waiting in a cold dark corridor surrounded by switches and wires, only to find that the phenomenon, if it starts at all, suddenly commences in another room on another floor of the building. Such occurrences can cause irritation, amusement or suspicion – the latter especially if there is a youngster around at the time." (*Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*).

Yet whilst recognising the rules of evidence and the burden of proof, Tony Cornell accepted that we lack proof to show that spirits and discarnate presences cannot be photographed (presuming spirits to exist). Although cameras had established nothing, "Why should the witness who sees a ghost not be right? What proof do we hold that it isn't in fact their dead grandmother coming back to them, and causing strange images along the way?"

Cameras and pictures actually remove us a further step away from the experience itself and its reality, whatever it may be. I am drawn back to emphasising the

importance of witness testimony and its superiority to any number of unqualified film recordings. Questioning a witness who has actually seen a ghost may reveal many new lines of enquiry to follow up. In contrast, the curiosity and sense of enquiry of those who simply examine pictures often ossifies, their hopes having been realised.

With the human brain of a witness we have the most complex detection system in the Universe. While I am aware of the fallibilities of human testimony, this can never provide a reason for rejecting all witness testimony. It is only because eyewitness testimony can be trusted on certain occasions that we can ever deem it unreliable in others.

We should not forget that while instrumentation may indicate the existence of realities beyond the human brain, the readings and recordings only present a picture of that presumed reality, not the reality itself. The object or phenomenon being connected with ('the thing in itself') ultimately remains philosophically controversial and unknown.

It is precisely these currently unanswerable questions, the flaws and knots in philosophical arguments on human experience, proof and perception that encourage the fascination with paranormal experience on an intellectual level. We do not understand, let alone explain, ordinary visual perception within the living human (or mammalian eye and brain). Ultimately, whether a materialist or a believer in transcendental reality, a point is reached where faith takes over. Another Cambridge scholar and writer of ghost stories, Montague Rhodes James (1863-1936), put it (echoed with approval by Catholic ghost hunter Sir Shane Leslie): "We don't know the rules". (*Shane Leslie's Ghost Book*, 1955).

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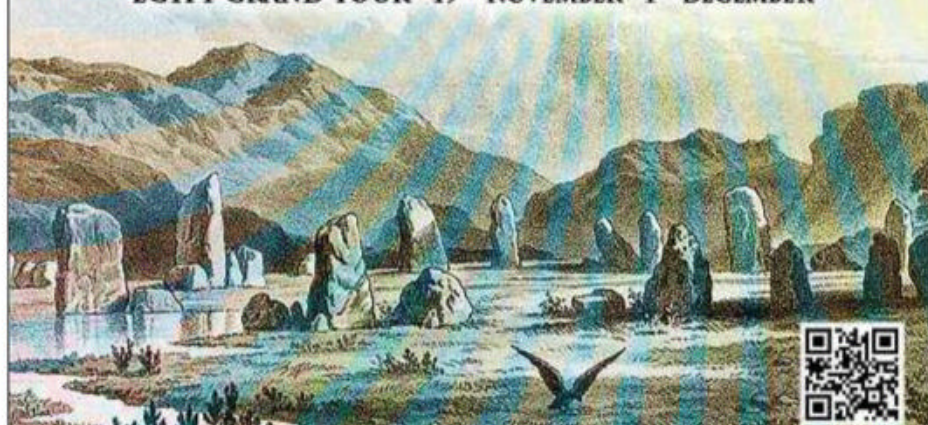
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GHOST STORIES

Two cases of spectral toilet flushers – from Essex and Cape Town – and a rum looking “human ghost” spreading fear on Zambian roads



PHOTOS: HARRY HUBBARD / SWNS.COM

ABOVE LEFT: 83-year-old Emily Sparks – plagued by a ghost called Joyce. ABOVE RIGHT: The spectre’s ‘party piece’ is to repeatedly flush the toilet in Emily’s bathroom.

PHANTOM FLUSHERS

Emily Sparks, 83, is haunted by a ghost that keeps flushing the loo. The spectre, which Emily calls Joyce, also pulled her hair out as she slept – until she started wearing a hat in bed. She spent £95 on two nights in a Travelodge in Southend just to get some relief – but ‘Joyce’ followed her there. “She’s attracted to my energy,” said Emily. “She’s leeching off me... But she couldn’t work the toilet there.”

When Emily moved into the flat in Chequers Road, Writtle, Essex, in 2011, she discovered that a woman called Joyce had been found dead on the kitchen floor two years before she moved in. “I’ve been told by the woman who found her that she was there for two days after she passed away,” said Emily, a Christian and mother of four who claims to have been a psychic for 35 years. She said the entity she believes is the ghost of Joyce started visiting her in June 2013 and has continued to do so ever since. She could feel the ghost “ice cold” next to her in bed, touching the top of her head.

“I was downstairs and I saw her coming down, I saw her profile,” she said. “I thought she doesn’t belong here. She

She spent £95 on two nights in a Travelodge just to get some relief

would be about 5ft 3in [1.6m], wearing a mustard cardigan with a tweed skirt. I’ve only seen her physically once, but I’ve seen her in a transparent state many times. If [ghosts] have an energy they can come across as being completely physical, but apparently they can come as they want to.

“She has travelled to other tenants that I’m aware of and she left them crying. Jack, who was in here before me, said he couldn’t bear to live there anymore because of what was going on. He was driving around in his car all day to get away.”

Despite the ‘haunting’ getting progressively worse, Emily was able to cope with the experience at first. “The TV would go off and my Tiffany light was going mad all the time, so I had to get rid of that,” she said. “She flushes the toilet in my bathroom, that’s her party piece. She was doing it slightly before Christmas, and I’ve seen

her. I thought, ‘What can I do here?’ After Christmas, she was flushing the toilet while I was using it and that freaked me out. I stood back and she flushed it again, again and again. One night I was reading, got into bed and she was flushing for three hours. It got to 2.30am and I hadn’t had a wink of sleep. I got out of bed and thought I’ve got to tie it up, so overnight I now tie the handle up so she can’t do it.”

In recent months, the spirit has spoken to her. “One day I was brushing my teeth and she said in my ear ‘I want it all’, four times. She’s talking about my hair. I can tell she doesn’t want me here and that she wants all my hair, she’s pulled some of it out. Even my hairdresser has noted that I’ve lost quite a lot of hair.”

In January, Emily found a ball of her own hair rolled up on the floor, suggesting the spirit had pulled it out during the night. It wasn’t the first time she’d done it, but this time it was different. “I put the hair that I found into a bag, showed it to my neighbour Pat, left it on the table and then it was gone,” she said. “She’s taken things before, and not just from me. Pat has seen her go into the lounge twice because apparently she likes going there. She’s had things like her

hearing aid taken from her flat, but when she asks her to bring it back, she does, so Pat’s never really had any aggravation from her... She’s been getting into the muscles in my thigh for quite a long time, sitting on the sofa, but I tried to ignore it. When I bend my leg to go up the stairs it gives way. Once when I was sitting here and I heard her say ‘coward’, and it wasn’t a whisper, it was a sharp, angry woman’s voice... A priest came and blessed me and my home, but it didn’t work. I’ve tried to get an exorcism. I’m not afraid, though. If anyone is going to deal with this, I am.”

Emily’s neighbour Patricia Payton-Brown, 65, claims she has also seen the ghost walking down the corridors in their sheltered housing complex. She has lived in her flat for seven years but only saw the ghost two years ago. “I was just about to go out when she caught my eye,” she said. “She was about 5ft 4in with black hair cut in a bob, black dark-rimmed glasses, a black cardigan and a black knee-length skirt. I wasn’t scared – I just thought, ‘Oh, I don’t know who she is’. I do believe it but I haven’t had anything like Emily has had – she is more in tune with it all.” *essexlive.news*, 6+7 Feb; Sun, 8 Feb 2019.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

235: THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF



The myth

When humans are bereaved, we must work our way through the five stages of grief before we can recover from our loss: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance.

The "truth"

Don't feel worried or guilty if you don't go through the correct stages in the correct order: not one scientific study has ever found evidence for their being any "stages of grief," in that order or any other order, let alone for there being five, let alone them being the ones in that famous list. Grief is just grief; no two people will experience it the same way, and no person will experience it the same way twice. Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross came up with the Five Stages for her 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*. Although she wasn't the first to hypothesise the existence of stages of bereavement, it was her work that popularised the idea – despite the fact that she was writing about people facing their own death, not that of someone else. She never claimed to have any experimental evidence for the stages. As so often happens, when popular culture got hold of the concept it muddled the details before boiling them down to a catch-phrase, and it's not uncommon today to hear even medical practitioners talking about the Five Stages as if they were an established reality.

Sources

www.scientificamerican.com/article/five-fallacies-of-grief/; www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/broken-hearts/200909/no-stages-grief; www.bbc.com/future/story/20130219-are-there-five-stages-of-grief

Mythchaser

Since the beginning of antibiotics we've been told that we must complete any course prescribed because otherwise Tinkerbell will die (or something). But a couple of years ago, researchers claimed that this was a myth, and a possible contributor to global antibiotic resistance. What's happened since then? Has the debunking lasted the course, or have the antibodies of orthodoxy overwhelmed it?



ABOVE: Ntombosindiso Thuthani and her haunted outside loo. BELOW: Photos of the terrifying Zambian road ghost taken by Prophet Shepherd M Mesala.

• Ntombosindiso Thuthani, a South African woman, believes her son's ghost is returning to her shack in Marikana, Cape Town, every night and using the toilet. She believes the spirit of 17-year-old Yamkela is lost because his body wasn't returned to her shack, but was taken to the Eastern Cape for burial. "They should've brought him to Marikana first because he lived here," she said. "Now his spirit is haunting us. The trouble started a day after his funeral. At first I thought it was a naughty child, but then I noticed it happened at the same time [every night]. That's how I knew it was him." She would hear a knock on the door, and when she asked who was there, the person would just say she should let him in. Then she would hear someone going through her toiletries before heading to the toilet. A native doctor recommended a ritual to lay the ghost, but a pastor said the nocturnal visitor wasn't Yamkela's ghost but a demon. *naij.com (Nigeria)*, 19 Sept 2018.

MURDEROUS GHOST

Rumours of a "human ghost" appearing on the Lusaka-Kabwe road in Zambia and causing accidents have spread alarm among motorists.



Prophet Shepherd M Mesala encountered the ghost while driving from Chongwe to Kabwe. The "popular prophet" commanded the ghost to stand still in the name of Jesus Christ. He stepped out of his car and prayed by the roadside before walking towards the spectre and taking these photographs – or so we are told by *The Zambian Observer* online (21 Jan 2019). After about 10 minutes, the ghost promised to cause no more accidents in that road "if it was let go". (How the man of God was constraining the spectre is not explained.) After a further five minutes, "the Ghost spoke with a small voice that it was sent to cause over 123 accidents in the Lusaka-Kabwe road before it can shift to another road. It said one of its missions was to also kill about 15 pastors and prophets of God." (We love that "about 15".) Prophet Mesala "did not tolerate the nonsense" so "he opened a heavy prayer by fire, commanding the living Ghost to burn immediately". The ghost begged him not to kill it, but more heavy praying sent it packing, and it disappeared into the nearest bush.

You can check out the story by ringing the man of God himself on +260954689538.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Holy bone finds a home, bogus bobbies, and the Russian 'genius' who turned corpses into dolls...

DOLL COLLECTOR [FT283:4]



Anatoly Moskvina, 52, a cemetery expert and historian from Nizhny Novgorod in Russia, stole

29 corpses of girls and dressed them in knee-high boots with lipstick, using wax to turn them into 'dolls'. After drying the bodies, he wrapped their limbs in strips of cloth or stuffed them with padding, sometimes adding wax masks decorated with nail polish over their faces. He then dressed them in brightly coloured children's clothes and wigs. Some also had music boxes inside their ribcages. He hosted tea parties in his bedroom for the girls, sang children's songs, and played cartoons on a computer. Neither colleagues nor his elderly parents, who lived in the same apartment block, noticed anything unusual. His mother told police after he was arrested: "We saw these dolls but we didn't suspect there were dead bodies inside. We thought it was his hobby."

During the trial in 2011, Moskvina – who speaks 13 languages and was described in court as a genius – gave conflicting explanations for his actions. He initially said that he was lonely and wanted to communicate with the girls, but later claimed he had tried to find ways to resurrect them. He also said he wanted to become a mummification expert. He told detectives "not to rebury the girls too deeply because I will gather them again when I am free". He also told bereaved parents: "You abandoned your girls in the cold – and I brought them home and warmed them up." He said he carefully selected which corpses to take, telling the police: "I lay on the grave and tried to get in touch with her. I listened to what she said. Often they asked me



ABOVE: The red and gold wax-sealed reliquary containing a bone fragment said to belong to Pope St Clement has now been presented to Westminster Cathedral.

to take them out for a walk." Police say he was not motivated by twisted sexual desires, with one officer saying: "He loathed sex and thought it was disgusting."

A court order to keep him in a psychiatric ward expired last December. Psychiatrists claimed they had cured him and recommended outpatient treatment – but then dramatically reversed their claim. Now they want him to be held indefinitely, but as no new court order has been granted, Moskvina is technically free to leave, and is said to have plans to move to Moscow. With a court poised to rule on the issue, relatives of the deceased children have expressed outrage at the prospect of his release. "He is incurable," said Natalia Chardymova, 46, mother of one of the victims. "He will just stop taking pills, and at some stage he will return to his terrible actions as he had promised he'd do. I still find it hard to grasp the scale of his sickening 'work', but for nine years he was living with my mummified daughter Olga in

his bedroom. I had her for 10 years, he had her for nine." The original news reports said his victims were aged between 12 (or 15) and 26 (or 30), but now they are said to be between three and 12. *dailymail.co.uk*, *rt.com*, 8 Feb 2019.

POPE'S BONE [FT368:20]



Last May, workers for Enviro Waste found a reliquary in a dustbin in central London.

The red and gold wax-sealed case was marked "Ex. Oss. S. Clementis PM" (From the bones of St Clement, proto-martyr). According to Tertullian (AD 155-240), Clement was Pope from AD 88 up to his death in about 100, the third after Peter and Linus. Allegedly ordained priest by St Paul and bishop by St Peter, his letter to the Corinthians is one of the oldest surviving Christian documents. The story goes that he was banished by the Emperor Trajan and sent to work in a stone quarry in Greece. There

he began a Christian ministry to aid his fellow prisoners. After he prayed for water for the parched quarry workers, a spring welled up from the earth. That won him many converts, but the authorities tied him to an anchor and tossed him into the Black Sea, a martyrdom that later made him patron saint of mariners (along with blacksmiths, for some reason). His Feast Day is 23 November.

Supposedly his remains were buried at a monastery in the Crimea, where they were discovered by the Greek missionary St Cyril in AD 868 and taken to the Basilica di San Clemente in Rome, which is said to have been built over the foundations of Clement's house (a likely story). An abbey at Abruzzo, Italy, still claims to hold most of Clement's remains in a marble chest.

Sophie Andreae, architectural historian and vice chair of the patrimony committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, got in touch with the owner of Enviro Waste, James Rubin, to request that the relic be given to Westminster Cathedral. On 19 June it was presented to Archbishop George Stack in the Lady Chapel, and it can now be seen in the Treasures of Westminster Cathedral exhibition. It had been in the possession of someone who wishes to remain anonymous, and was one of a number of items stolen from a car in central London.

Ms Andreae said: "Whilst the shrines of famous English saints such as St Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral and St Thomas a Becket at Canterbury were destroyed at the English Reformation, on the Continent many Catholic churches house relics of important and much revered saints. For example, St Francis and St Anthony attract large numbers of pilgrims from all over the world to tombs in



Assisi and Padua respectively and the Basilica of St Peter's in Rome is built about the crypt containing the bones of St Peter himself." *Guardian*, 2 May; *The Tablet*, 19 June; *D.Telegraph*, catholicnews.org.uk, 20 June 2018.

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS [FT366:8]

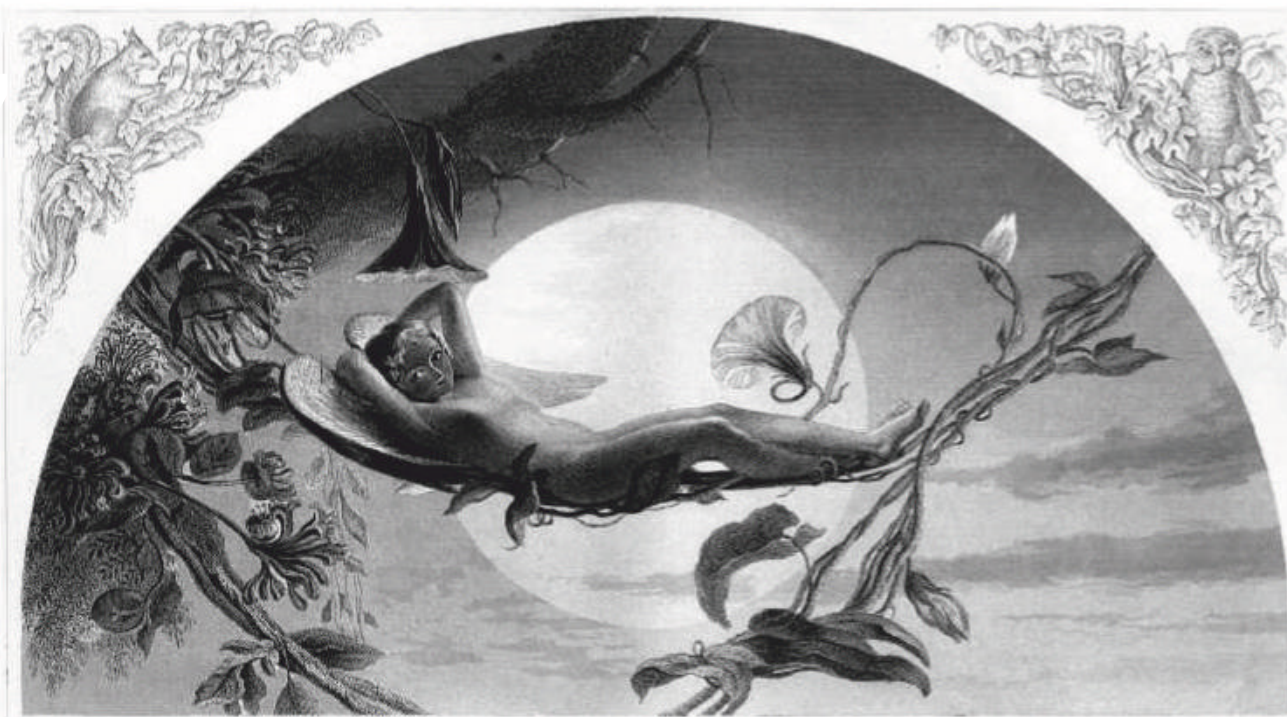


Or, in this case, bogus police officers. On 13 November 2018, a man and a woman entered the home of an elderly woman in London Road, Cheltenham. Both were white and in their mid-to-late 30s. A Gloucestershire Police spokesman said: "They were not wearing uniform and did not offer identification. They entered the woman's property and stayed for around 15 minutes talking to the woman, saying they knew she lived alone and wondered how she coped. The man walked around the bedroom while the woman stayed in the sitting room. Nothing appears to have been stolen, but it's unknown why the couple entered the woman's property or who they were." *Western Daily News*, 16 Nov 2018.

AUM SHINRIKYO [FT84:9, 372:24]



The Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult carried out the deadly Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995. Though the last six of the 13 cultists on death row where executed last July, the cult evidently still poses a threat. This January, envelopes containing threatening letters and a powder believed to be potassium cyanide were sent to a dozen Japanese companies. The senders' names written on the envelopes were executed cult leaders. A letter sent to the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper threatened to distribute the poisonous powder unless £24,000 was paid in Bitcoin. *D.Telegraph*, 30 Jan 2019.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

CULT OF THE NORFOLK FAUNS

Fairy religion is today a 'thing': books are published, incense is burnt, and the faithful meet in wooded glades to propitiate the fey. I had always thought that this was a modern phenomenon, but a British historian, Francis Young (no relation), has recently suggested that the earliest evidence for fairy religion in these islands dates back some 1,500 years to, of all places, East Anglia.

The story begins in the late fourth or the very early fifth century, when a Romano-Briton buried a hoard of treasure at what had once been an Iron Age temple – Gallows Hill, Thetford. This site was very much in line with the pagan flavour of the hoard: the gold buckle, for instance, has a magnificent satyr on it. There was also a set of 33 silver spoons: several of the spoons were inscribed with dedications to Faunus – a Roman woodland spirit from which we get the word 'faun'. But then on several spoons there are also British-Celtic names, in many cases coupled with 'Faunus', giving us confusing concatenations of words. For instance, one of the spoons had: 'Dei Fau[ni] Medugeni' – 'Of the God Faunus, Medugenus' – Medugenus probably being 'Mead-Born'. But what do these words *actually* mean? There are three possibilities: 'Of the God Faunus, the one we call Medugenus'; 'Of the God Faunus, the mead-born'; or 'Of the God Medugenus, the

faun'. Dr Young, in his recently published work *Suffolk Fairylure*, has come out in favour of the last interpretation. In fact, Young goes so far as to suggest that the various Celtic names on the spoons represent "not so much a cult of Faunus as a cult of the local fauns, envisaged as deities". In other words, we have some wealthy Romano-

Britons worshipping a circle of Norfolk nature sprites! Is he right? I happily leave the problem to historians of Roman Britain. But some of the British-Celtic words are – with the normal health-warnings about uncertain interpretations – suggestive of fertility spirits: Seed-bearer (Saturnio), Blossom-bringer (Blutugi), and Cutting-Edge (Tugi, perhaps a plough). It might also be worth noting that Romano-British fairy rituals – if that is what we do in fact have here – sound like fun. If the reference to 'mead'

is not enough to get you reaching for your pint glass, then bear in mind that the hoard also contained three silver strainers. They suggest something being imbibed; as, indeed, do the spoons. Oxford archaeologist Daphne Nash Briggs has even evoked a scene where the ritual objects were used by worshippers "naked but for the jewellery" who re-enacted outrageous episodes from pagan mythology before settling down to a good old 'Bacchic Feast'.

Simon Young's new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* (Gibson Square) is out now.

THE SPOONS ARE
INSCRIBED WITH
DEDICATIONS
TO FAUNUS,
A ROMAN
WOODLAND
SPIRIT



The balloon's a moon... or is it Venus?

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

IT WAS ALWAYS ONLY YOU, APHRODITE

John Keeling has dug out reports of Japanese *fu-go* balloon sightings in the USA from the spring and summer of 1945 – except there's a catch. As he tells it: "9,000 of the 30ft [9m] balloons with incendiary bomb payloads had been launched against the US in the hope of causing large-scale forest fires and spreading terror. For many months the authorities in the West and Pacific North West had successfully kept an embargo on confirmed landings until six people were killed by an exploding Fu-Go in Oregon (the only known deaths on US soil from enemy action in WWII). When the threat was revealed in May '45, numerous panics ensued..."

"On June 6th, Phoenix and several other Arizona communities had their first 'Jap balloon' panic. Telephone lines to the press, police department, sheriff's office and weather bureau were reportedly jammed 'while at the air fields planes were sent out to hunt down the invader...Men, women and children shaded their eyes and gazed at the round white speck which was... just about 25 feet up and north of the new moon.'"

Much excitement, naturally. But: "Luke Field and Williams Field fliers, checking the object from planes, were able to report back definitely that there was no balloon where reported. And Phoenix Junior College's 5-inch refractor telescope clearly identified the object as Venus."

So, a little more than a year before anyone had heard of 'flying saucers', there was Venus, doing her unidentifiable thing. It was 'prentice work for a long career. This wasn't the first time Venus had been mistaken for a *fu-go* balloon, nor would it be the last. The objects next most frequently misidentified as *fu-go* balloons were plain ol' weather balloons, also later to become popular as 'UFOs'. Start as you mean to go on... (Full story at <https://johnkeelingmedia.blog/2019/01/15/>) It is a curious, related, but previously unreported fact that my sister, when at her house on a Cycladean isle, was wont to remark "Ah, there's the spaceship!" upon spying Hesperus glowing in the dusk, and "Oh! The spaceship's gone!" when it vanished behind the nearby mountain. And she has been blessed all her life with 100 per cent ignorance about UFOs.

FOLLOW THE MONEY?

John Greenwalde (he of the Black Vault, and probably the world's greatest winkler-out of UFO-related documents from the US



LEFT: A US Army Air Corps photo showing a *fu-go* balloon... or could it be Venus?

Government) has unearthed some new facts about the Defense Intelligence Agency's 'secret UFO project', AATIP (see **FT363:28, 377:14**). The first being that he's established that its name, long ambiguous, was the 'Advanced Aerospace (not 'aviation') Threat Identification Program'. And Greenwalde also had it from the horse's mouth that the DIA "is also not aware of any report or study produced, outside the 38 reports listed in the 'Attachments' section of the letter to Senators John McCain and Jack Reed", which some might politely call speculative fiction, and others as unmitigated woo. So, no 490-page study about UFOs, as widely asserted. Greenwalde added: "When asked about UFOs specifically, the answer was about aerial threats and projecting ahead 40 years on what those threats could be... it appears the DIA is standing strong that it was not a UFO research program, or at least, will not address it."

The murky plot thickens, in that Swedish researcher Roger Glassel also heard from the DIA, who told him that Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Space Studies LLC (BAASS) was the sole bidder for the contract. Back to that in a minute. "The purpose of AATIP was to investigate foreign aerospace weapons system applications with foreign technology projections over the next 40 years... The contract goal was to study 12 technical areas: lift, propulsion, armament, signatures reduction ['stealth', in vulgar parlance], materials, configuration, power generation, temporal translation [Er?], human effects, human interface, and technology integration... After an Office of the Secretary

of Defense/DIA review in late 2009, it was determined that the reports were of limited value to the DIA..." What a surprise. The 38 reports in question had, unless one's false memory syndrome has gone exponential, all been previously published and mostly didn't address the 'contract goals', which were all about *terrestrial weaponry*. Of 'limited value' looks like a polite way of saying that what BAASS produced was basically crap. And was never meant to address UFOs, which is what I'd suggested some time ago in this column.

Meanwhile another irrepressible burrower into furtive military activity, New Zealander Paul Dean, discovered that precisely the same terms that AATIP was bandying about were already part of the USAF's National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC)'s stated mission. Your average cynic (who, me?) would say that, perhaps with dollar signs in their eyes, AATIP and BAASS were piggybacking on something already underway. To make a very, very minor contribution at best: for, as Dean says, "the notion that such investigations could be solely handled by just one single under-resourced person, who in this case was DIA employee and AAWSAP/AATIP manager Luis Elizondo, is of course preposterous. Even with outside contractual assistance, the workload would be insurmountable." (<https://ufos-documenting-the-evidence.blogspot.com/2019/02/foreign-aerospace-threats-emerging-and.html>)

But those dollar signs themselves set up a puzzle of their own. Senator Harry Reid, basically, got the funding for AATIP, and BAASS, owned by Reid's mate Bigelow, got the contract and, we must presume, the bulk of the money in return for some recycled woo. So the questions arise: Why did Bigelow, a billionaire we are told, need (to him) such a piddling sum? And what exactly, between 2007 and 2012, did Elizondo *do* as manager of AATIP? Did he slightly exaggerate his workload? My first guess at the moment is yes; and my second is that the DIA tender was, thanks to Senator Reid, written in such a way that only Bigelow could have met its demands – and he wanted that so that he could say he was ufologically or even, heaven forfend, scientifically respectable enough to win a government contract 'to study UFOs'. Which he didn't. Nice try, but no cigar; not yet anyway. *Exspecta videque*, as we scholars like to say.



Small screen saucery

JENNY RANGLES welcomes a new wave of UFO-related shows coming to television

Television networks and streaming services appear to have made a new discovery: UFOs. Suddenly, cop shows and hospital dramas are old hat, and things that go beep in the night are flavour of the month. Platforms like Amazon and Netflix have quickly seen the value of science fiction to capture the binge-watch market, seeking to join the success of HBO's *Game of Thrones* with genre programming such as the *Star Trek* revivals and time travel series like *Outlander* and *Travellers*.

Even the new spin-off prequel series for *GoT* is being created by Jane Goldman, married for 30 years to UK TV presenter Jonathan Ross. 23 years ago, while I was writing the UFO-related books tied to the TV series *Strange But True?*, which dramatised real-life cases such as the Alan Godfrey abduction and Rendlesham, Jane was honing her writing with two books telling the true stories that inspired the fictional TV drama *The X-Files*. In fact, we both gave talks at the UK *X-Files* convention that year. So UFOs as box office is not entirely a new phenomenon, and indeed *Project UFO* was a fictionalised saga of the US Air Force investigation into the subject all of 40 years ago. Here in the UK, two episodes of north Yorkshire set police TV drama *Heartbeat*, which ran for 372 episodes between 1992 and 2010, were loose, semi-fictionalised retellings of real UK UFO cases. One of them was Alan Godfrey's abduction from a police patrol car and the other was another MUFORA case. MUFORA had solved a UFO sighting that recurred in the early hours of Saturday mornings, week after week, in the early 1980s. It terrified witnesses but proved to be a cargo plane gliding without lights, other than a ghostly red tail fin. In the *Heartbeat* version, naturally, it was the police who solved the case, not UFO researchers – although one of our team was a CID officer.

UFOs as the basis for drama in its own right now appear to have found their time again. In fact, three separate series are either here already or in development. *Roswell, New Mexico*, hit US screens on 15 January. It's a remake of *Roswell*, itself based on a series of novels, in which young aliens who 'crashed' in the infamous 1947 incident at the dawn of the UFO age are now living in the modern-day town – as you do when stranded light years from home, I



ABOVE: *Roswell, New Mexico* is just one of a number of new TV series to engage with UFO lore.

suppose. The new series has the advantage of being made by Amblin, and so has Steven Spielberg as an executive producer, and is averaging about two million viewers in the US. No British air date or channel had been announced at the time of going to press but it would be a surprise for it not to appear later in 2019.

Another new series, *Project Blue Book*, is quite another matter. It is a factual drama series, which began on the History Channel in the US a week before *Roswell*, and like the Amblin show it has a famous executive producer – Robert Zemeckis, who has worked with Spielberg and made classic films in his own right, such as *Back to the Future*. *Project Blue Book* is about that US Air Force UFO investigation project which ran for over 20 years until closed in 1969 and investigated many classic UFO cases. There was actually a 1980s series loosely based on the same idea called *Project UFO*; the characters and cases were fictional, though the true story inspiring them was usually obvious. 2019's *Project Blue Book*, on the other hand, devotes each episode to a major case – a real incident from UFO history that was investigated by Blue Book. Examples so far include the Flatwoods Monster, the Lubbock Lights, Foo Fighters and the Florida Scoutmaster cases, all in the first half dozen episodes.

It has actors playing the real people involved, including two I was lucky enough to know a little later in their lives: Dr J Allen Hynek and his wife Mimi, who were extremely hospitable and let me housesit their Illinois home and access Allen's Blue Book files when I was working on the then recent Rendlesham Forest case. I also took a memorable road trip with them

across the US that took us to Boulder, Colorado, home of the infamous Condon study that recommended the US Government shut down Blue Book. I met some of the scientists involved, who are also featured in this new TV series.

In this drama Mimi Hynek is played by Laura Mennell, a Canadian actress who previously starred in *The Man in the High Castle*, and her husband Allen by Irish

actor Aidan Gillen, best known for playing Littlefinger in *Game of Thrones*. He is very believable as the amiable, *Monty Python*-loving local astronomer co-opted by chance into explaining flying saucers to the US Air Force at Wright Patterson base in Dayton, Ohio. Dr Hynek ended up believing that something was really going on, and 30 years later, with Steven Spielberg, he would provide the title for, and appear in, the best UFO movie ever made: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Happily, *Project Blue Book* has been a success in the States and a second series was commissioned just before I filed this article. It has also been sold to the UK TV Channel Syfy and the first series will start airing in March 2019.

The third TV series, due for 2020 release by Sony and being created by *Doctor Who* writer Joe Ahearne, is *Rendlesham*, starring Hollywood A-lister Laurence Fishburne as a US Air Force airman. Rendlesham is the case that took me to stay with Allen and Mimi and which I have written about often in this magazine. The *Strange But True?* episode on the case attracted over 12 million viewers, making it the most watched UFO-based programme ever screened on UK TV.

This new eight-part Sony series seems to have a fictional plot told in two timelines: 2020, the 40th anniversary of Rendlesham, when Fishburne's character returns to the UK for the first time in years, and his memories of what happened to him in the forest in 1980 (just weeks after Alan Godfrey's own UFO abduction in Yorkshire). Looking back, those few weeks were the height of UFO mania in Britain. And it looks as if we are entering a new age where TV is starting to fall in love with the aliens again.

RAISING CHILDREN

PART 1: AIRBORNE ADVENTURES

BOB RICKARD presents the first part of a brief survey of tales concerning the levitation and teleportation of children – including abductions by fairies and ghosts, cases of mediumistic and shamanistic flight, and seemingly spontaneous supernatural abilities.

In her magisterial study of Japanese shamanism, Carmen Blacker stated that “the belief that children may in an unguarded moment be kidnapped by a subtle and malignant enemy of supernatural description is a fairly widespread one throughout the world.”¹ Indeed, the recent, wide-ranging study by Joshua Cutchin² confirms that this particular ‘anomalous experience’ is not confined to the past, nor to any one culture, but might well be related, therefore, to some profoundly ‘shamanistic’ experience, accessible to us all, regardless of cultural and psychological determinants.

Although Cutchin explores the notion that humankind is being manipulated by some capricious, psychically invasive ‘Other’ – an ancient suspicion championed by the likes of John Keel, Whitley Streiber and others – it is obvious from accumulated reports from divers peoples and circumstances, that, whatever it is, it is seemingly universal, not local. We are only beginning to discover this; understanding what it all means, though, is still a long way off.

My own interest is in narratives of apparent transportation through the air – sometimes over considerable distances – by means that are not obvious to everyday perception, deduction or expectation. The phenomenon is a mystery wrapped in an enigma. Such reports that we can find are very rare and scattered across many cultures and disciplines. When we do find a record, it is never as explicit as we would like. With diligence and luck, we still might find tales of adults who levitate or teleport; usually (but not always) these are of saints or shamans, mediums or ascetics, who have striven mentally, physically and spiritually for a long time to gain (or be given) this paranatural ability. How could a mere child match them?



ABOVE: An engraving from Wirt Sikes's 1880 book *British Goblins* shows Jennet Francis struggling to rescue her baby from the fairies.

A tug of war between a mother and a cloud of malevolent fairies

Then again, as I hope to show, there are levitants who once were mothers, soldiers, or people who led dissolute lives. Some had great intelligence and others were quite backward; some were healthy while others were ill or dying; and while the greatest recorded numbers were Christian, comparative accounts can be found in many other religions and even occur in circumstances

that have no religious context: all strong hints that the paranatural transportation process might be available to all under certain circumstances.

This begs some very important questions. Supposing such abilities – ‘wild talents’ as Charles Fort termed them – exist, can they be learned; or are they something stumbled upon unexpectedly, regardless of age, intelligence, determination or piety? Is it some kind of involuntary psychological explosion or ‘awakening’ that rewrites ‘reality’ for a moment, sweeping mind and body along in its wake, no more resistible than a mystic’s overwhelming moment of ‘illumination’ or ecstasy? Levitation or teleportation involving human minors, then, appears to be a pointer to the universality of these cryptic ‘talents’. The mystery is the actual mechanism of these processes; something that may yet be resolved through a developed scientific method.³

Perhaps the most familiar genre in which children are transported mysteriously is the one inhabited by those mischievous scapegoats, the fairies. Once upon a time a Scotsman was stranded upon a lonely rock in the sea off the west coast of Scotland. Believing himself beyond rescue, he fell to crying out, begging for one more chance to see his young child. When he awoke from fitful sleep, there was a large bag alongside him and something within, child-sized and wriggling. In his abnormal state of mind, fearing evil, he drew his knife and stabbed until the bag was still. Opening it with trepidation, he saw his own dear child there, dead.

This story is a fiction. It comes from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped*,⁴ in which it is a tale told by the soldier Alan Breck to the young protagonist David Balfour. Given Stevenson’s interest in Scottish folklore, it is highly likely that this



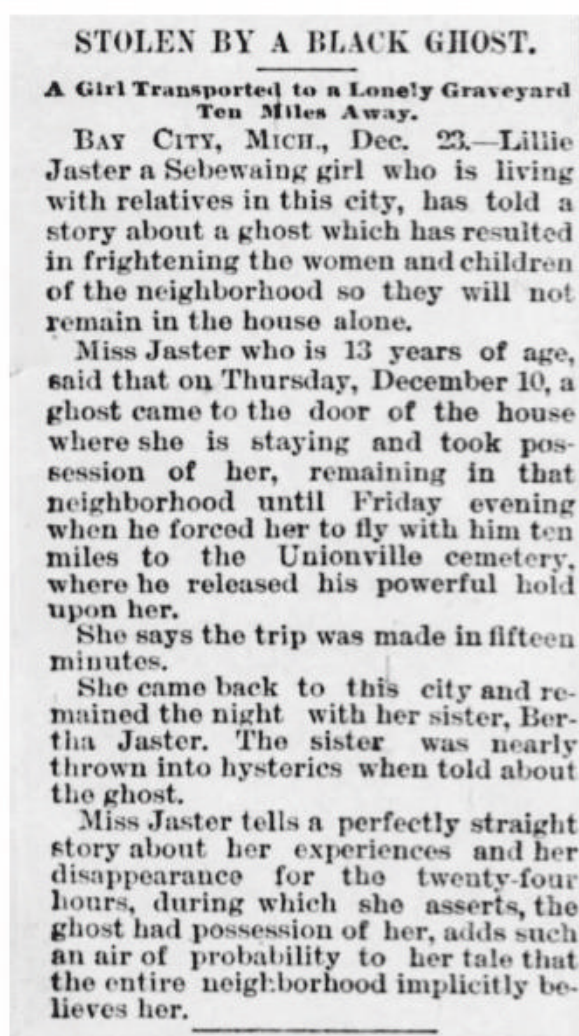
story or elements of it were well known to him. Stevenson sets this little tragedy on a lonely sea-bound rock which turns out to be a real rocky outcrop – called “Skerryvore” – once owned by the Stevenson family. He describes the rock as a place “the Good People were in use to come and rest as they went through to Ireland”. In this way, we are led to believe that it was the fairies, the Good People, who tried, with sinister fairy logic, to do the stranded man a favour (if only to stop his wailing).

As we know, fairylore is full of stories of kidnapped children, some of them substituted with a sickly simulacrum that, it is said, fails to thrive.⁵ A good number of fairy-related charms are prophylactics against the unexpected abduction of adults as well as children. Sometimes the charms enable the return of a ‘missing’ loved one. A memorable scenario – a tug-of-war between a protective mother and a cloud of malevolent fairies – appeared in Wirt Sikes’s *British Goblins* in 1880, an illustrated anthology of Welsh fairylore.⁶ It was an engraving that helped shape the British popular imagination, stoking the general anxiety about the ‘Good People’ and what they got up to.

In this case, the event illustrated was claimed to have actually happened. Sikes had purloined the account from the writings of the Welsh preacher Edmund Jones, who claimed to have had the account from the mother herself.⁷ Jones had written: “Jennet Francis, of *Ebwy vawr*, told me that something, for she saw nothing, endeavoured very sensibly to take away her infant son Thomas from her arms, but as she worded it, ‘God and me were [too] hard for him’.” Jones added that the baby “is now alive and a famous preacher of the Gospel”. For good measure, Jones prefaced it with a similar story about another mother in *Ebwy vawr* (now in Gwent). Dazzy Walter was nursing someone else’s baby when she noticed that the child was missing from her bed. In a panic, she felt about for it, eventually locating it “upon some boards above the bed”⁸ with no reasonable way for it to have got up there. “The spirits could not go with it any further,” noted Jones. He meant it too, for he believed firmly in the fairies. As we shall see, some tales of paranaturally abducted children do not end so well.

GRAVEYARD SHIFTS

The narrative can take the simplest of forms; for example, Charles Fort tells us of a “daughter of Jesse Miller, of Greenville Township, Somerset Co., Pa., who was transported several times, out of the house, into the front yard”. This was in 1883, and “it was her belief that apparitions were around.”⁹ Similar stories, seemingly authentic in their simplicity, are for many modern readers rendered unbelievable, partly because they are located in ancient, hard-to-find documents, and partly because of their context. It is in this latter aspect that fairies, ghosts, spirits and other agencies seem interchangeable.



A ‘ghost’ was also blamed in a rather vivid account recorded in an autobiography by the Portuguese writer Francis de Homem Christo. In October 1919, having been expelled from Portugal’s Coïmbra University “for refusing to conform to religious custom and armed revolt”, he, his wife, their six-week-old baby and two maids rented a two-storey house in the city outskirts. It turned out to have a reputation for being haunted. By daylight or candlelight all was normal, but when darkness fell or candles went out shutters and windows would open, doors slam shut and pounding shake the walls of the ground floor. Time after time, the family and any guests would quickly strike a light and search for the culprit, but without success.

LEFT: Francis de Homem Christo, who recorded a tale of supernatural transportation of an infant in his autobiography. **BELOW LEFT:** The strange tale of Lillie Jaster – abducted by a ‘black ghost’.

Moreover, the invisible force would strike the incumbents’ heads and arms with bruising blows. Homem Christo was sceptical at first, but after complaints from his guests, he decided to spend a night on the haunted ground floor. He shut and checked the front door and windows, closing shutters and sash window. As soon as his candle went out, he saw by the growing moonlight the sash and shutters open. He rushed outside to find no one; then the door slammed shut locking him out. He had to call his wife to let him in.

They both became frightened and decided to go upstairs together to get more candles. “As we were going up the stairs, pressed against each other, I suddenly felt her getting heavy and pulling me back... She started crying and struggling: ‘Francis, help! Somebody has got hold of my feet’.” Thinking there was an intruder but seeing no one in the moonlight, he fired his pistol at the darkness as they both ran to the bedroom and shut the door. His wife rushed to check the cradle but it was empty: “She fainted away”. Then he heard the servant calling in the distance and “the soft wailing of a baby which seemed to come from under the floor... It required some courage to go up and down stairs in that house, to search the whole ground floor holding a lamp on high. I found the infant, quite naked, all its swaddling-clothes taken off, placed on its back in the middle of a marble table.”

Christo added: “This horrible adventure put me in such a state of breakdown that I could no longer face my invisible enemy. This last conjuring trick, this baby taken from one storey to another without our being able to guess how it passed the staircase – or walls – it could not be explained, could not be tolerated.” In the morning, with the despair of the unmanned, he called in the Coïmbra police. They, with some of his comrades, stayed the next night. It all occurred again and again, pausing only when lights were put back on. One officer “nearly killed himself fighting the walls” and many of them were heavily battered with brutal blows. They all left the house. Christo and family never went back.¹⁰

Would a more modern newspaper reportage appear more convincing? Here is a story of an incident that the citizens of Minerva – a township in Bracken County, Kentucky – still remembered vividly in 1900, even though the event occurred “more than 25 years” earlier.¹¹ A “bright three-year-old boy” was sitting in grass near his mother, “a respectable woman”, as she was making soap in a farmyard. “Suddenly, in front of [her] eyes, he arose and, with arms out-stretched, fairly floated away over the top of the fence to a graveyard about a half a mile away. The frantic mother followed, calling in vain to the little fellow to stop. With outstretched arms he moved along without paying the slightest

attention to her cries.

“While the terrified woman could see no one leading or carrying the boy she felt that something, a ghost or unseen power, was impelling him forward. When the graveyard was reached the lad skimmed over the fence in the same miraculous manner as at his home. When he reached the gravestone under which the remains of ancestors were buried, he sat down in [an] apparently hypnotic state. [She] rushed up to him.” The mother’s distress was compounded by the strange state of mind the boy was in. “He did not recognise her and jabbered away in an unintelligible way.” The boy, it was reported, “has ever since been a hopeless idiot”. Despite the clear description of the child floating unsupported, some may still doubt a story because the principals are not named, or because of the distance of time between the incident and its reportage.

Well, how about this? On 10 December 1891, claimed a Chicago newspaper, a 13-year-old girl was “almost instantly transported” to a location 10 miles away. Young Lillie Jaster, who was staying with relatives in the city’s Sebewaing district, declared that a “black ghost” came to the front door “and took possession of her” for the whole day. That evening, “he forced her to fly with him 10 miles to the Unionville Cemetery, where he released his powerful

hold upon her.” She made her way back home – I assume by conventional means – where her sister Bertha was “thrown into hysterics” by Lillie’s tale. When news of this spread, we are told that “women and children of the neighbourhood” were so frightened that “they will not remain in the house alone”. Nevertheless, reporters found the girl “perfectly straight” and said she recounted her disturbing adventure with “such an air of probability... that the entire neighbourhood implicitly believed her”.¹²

Similarly, locals on Killisnoo Island, off the southern coast of Alaska, wholeheartedly believed 15-year-old Mary Moses when she told of flying by night across a stretch of water; but then her story accorded perfectly with the shamanistic beliefs of her native tribe, the Tlingit. Her story came to light when her father would announce, to anyone

Mary’s story accorded with the shamanistic beliefs of her tribe

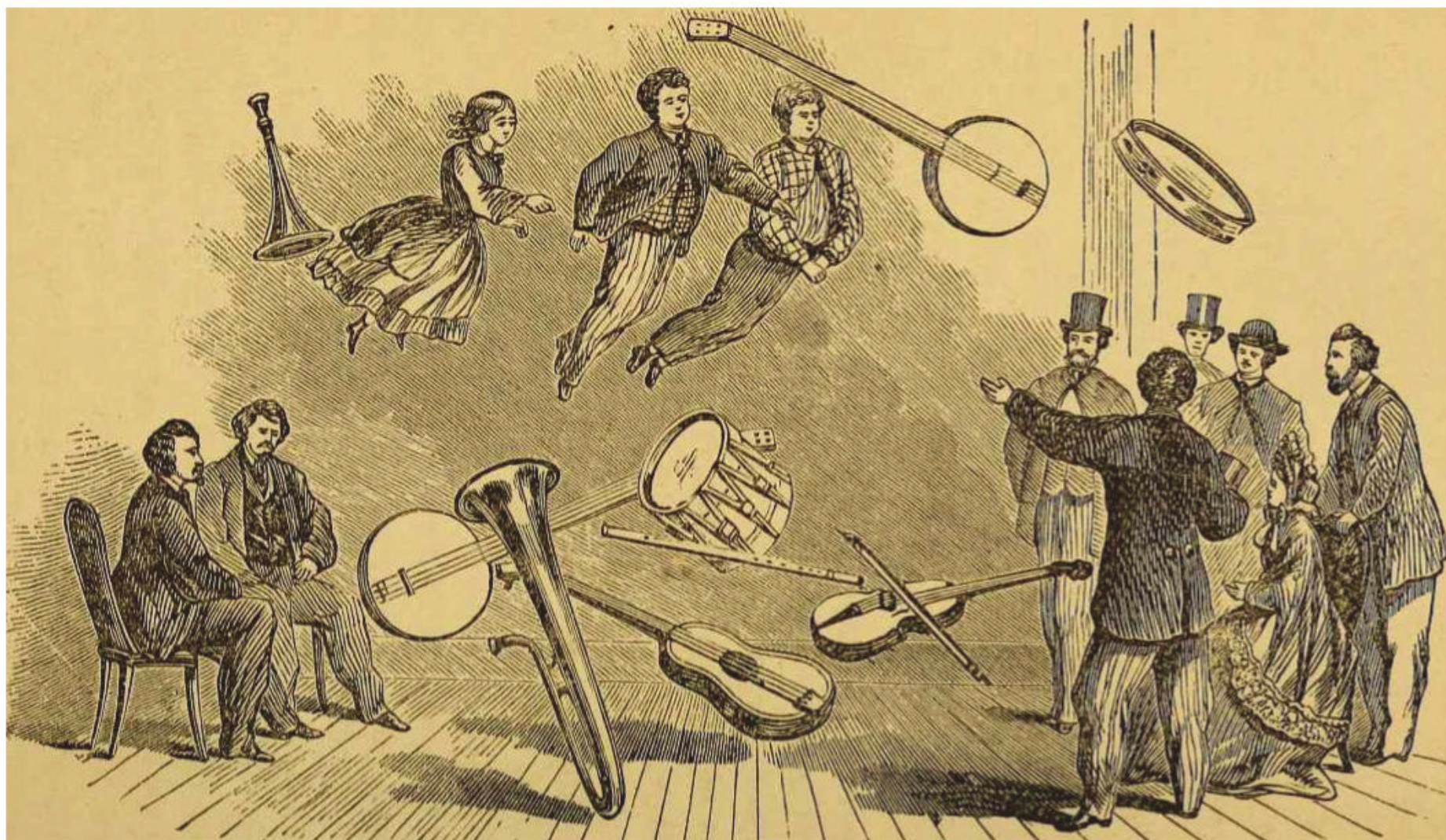


ABOVE: A Tlingit shaman photographed in 1900. **RIGHT:** An Alaskan news report of August 1917 told the story of Tlingit girl Mary Moses’s nocturnal flight with her father, a self-proclaimed tribal ‘witch’.

in earshot, that he was a witch and proudly claimed to be responsible for a number of unexplained and sudden deaths on the island. He was described as blind and cantankerous and all feared him. A tribal deputation tried to alert the authorities far away in Juneau, the state capitol. In the summer of 1917, under the direction of JA Smiser, a federal attorney, witnesses were examined but told that, even if his boast was true, there was no white man’s law on which he could be arrested.¹³

Mary – or Klan-tosh, as her Tlingit name was given – was one of those witnesses, saying she was fond of her grandmother, who had looked after her since her own mother died, but was “evidently sincere in her fear of her father’s power”. She remembered





ABOVE: The simultaneous levitation of all three of the Davenport children – Ira, William and Elizabeth – as described and illustrated in Ira Davenport Senior’s 1869 biography of Ira and William, who had by then found fame as spiritual mediums.

the night he woke her, a “long time ago”, and told her he was a witch, “and that he wanted her to learn to be one, too, in order that she might carry on his work when he died”. Mary’s father told her that in order to learn “the secrets of the practice” she must come with him to an old graveyard across the bay. She testified that she took hold of his foot “and in a moment they ‘flew’ across the channel to the cemetery [where] they were able to look through the earth down into the graves, and could see the bodies in them”. Sometime later, “her father transformed himself into a white duck and on his back she rode back across the channel”. Mary told the district attorney that that night she learned many things about witchcraft, and wanted something done about her father because she feared he “would kill her grandmother with witchery”. The official noted: “The girl’s story was told with straightforwardness and without contradiction.” Without any sense of irony, Smiser told the press: “It does look a little like hypnotism.”

A similar transportation across a (half-mile wide) river was reported to have occurred when Ira Davenport was aged 14, in 1853, in New York State. He and his brother William later became famous for their stage demonstrations of mediumship. Their biographer, Dr TL Nichols, wrote that one day “while engaged in his daily task of delivering evening papers, first felt ‘queer’, then lost his consciousness, and found himself standing in the snow, with no tracks around him to show how he had come there, in a solitary place, a mile and a half from home, on the right bank

Ira was pulled from his father’s side and lifted up to the ceiling

of the Niagara River.” Through a code of raps, Ira’s ‘spirit guide’ confessed responsibility, wanting to show the boy the scene of a murder.¹⁴

According to Ira Davenport Senior’s 1869 biography of the family, Ira and William, as infants, were advanced in intellect and enjoyed a telepathic rapport with each other. The family was introduced to Spiritualism by a valued friend of the father, who described seeing “a boy of five” floating over the heads of the company at a séance “in broad daylight”. Promptly, in mid-February 1855, the Davenports began experimenting. On their sixth sitting, Ira was pulled from his father’s side before being lifted up to the ceiling. Almost immediately he was joined by William and then their sister Elizabeth. On another occasion “[Ira] was carried 10ft [3m] in mid-air, through a room, hall, front yard, and tenderly landed in the street, over a fence, some 70ft [21m] from the spot whence he was taken.” We are struck by the claim that paranatural abilities ran strongly in the families of both parents.

TO BED, PERCHANCE TO LEVITATE

The simplest trope of levitation is that of rising gently upward from the bed and down again – although we know of others who came down with a sudden and forceful bump. Olivier Leroy, in his book on levitation, tells of a Dr Schmidt of Vienna, who “wanted to magnetise his daughter for some therapeutic purpose, was very surprised one day when he found that his patient arose above her bed.”¹⁵ Sadly, nothing much more can be said of the incident. We will deal with more violent levitations in the next instalment; for now, we begin as gently as Miss Schmidt’s elevation.

A very well-known case involved Nancy Wesley – the daughter of John Wesley, the English cleric who founded Methodism. Sometime towards the end of 1716, when she was 15 years old, her bed rose into the air with her upon it. The haunting of the Wesley parsonage is one of the most respectable poltergeist accounts on record, with as many as 12 residents present to witness the manifestations. Objects moved, knockings and other odd sounds were heard and strange phantoms seen. The blame was put, light-heartedly, upon ‘Old Jeffrey’, the spirit of someone who had died in the house a long time before. This was more than 130 years before the teenaged Fox sisters in America triggered the international movement of Spiritualism after they claimed that a ‘spirit’ made knocking noises in answer to questions.

As her brother John, 17, recorded the incident, one night, Nancy was in a shared bedroom playing cards “on the press bed” with her sisters Molly, Etty, Patty and Ketty. “They were in the room with Robert Brown [a servant],” wrote Jack (as they called their brother). “The bed on which my sister Nancy sat, was lifted up with her on it. She leapt down and said, ‘surely old Jeffrey would not run away with her’.” When the bed returned to its natural location, the others persuaded Nancy to sit upon it again, “which she had scarce done, when it was again lifted up several times successively, a considerable height, upon which she left her seat and would not be prevailed upon to sit there any more.”¹⁶

As an example of how bed levitations might be received today, we have a report from Australia, from March 1918. The local authorities and community of Gawler, north of Adelaide, struggled to understand what was going on when a young boy repeatedly rose into the air above his bed. The son of Benjamin Milton had, the previous month, experienced “spirit manifestations” (not described) and, on a doctor’s advice, been taken away for a short while. As he seemed well enough, and as requested by the Education Department, Mr Milton brought his son home again to continue his schooling. On the evening of Sunday 5 March, “he was put in his bed and within seconds propelled upwards” then fell back onto the floor. He was put back into the bed only to be “pitched out” again. We note the language used seems stronger than necessary to describe how a boy might launch himself out of bed athletically. ‘Propelled’ implies more speed and force, as does “pitched out”.¹⁷

As the police had attended the first episode, they arrived again, this time with a “Sister Lily Lingwood Smith, a Christian Spiritual Evangelist”, who “after a few inquiries” announced that “there was an unconscious medium in the house”. Twice she tried to put the boy into his bed and twice “he was thrown into the lady’s arms”. The police constable tested the bed and said he “felt a distinct movement”. Then Sister Lily, after “evoking the aid of the spirits”, announced that “the girl in the home was the unconscious medium”. This was the first mention of a girl and we never learn her name, age or relation to the boy. Sister Lily added that the phenomena would continue as long as the boy and girl were together. The children were removed to other homes (probably separated, but this is not clear) and the “manifestations of telekinesis” ceased. The story ends with a reference to the Fox sisters.

THE OTHER BELL WITCH

In contrast, we have the case of 13-year-old Alice Bell Kirby, the seventh of a farmer’s eight daughters, from Jonesville, Louisiana, who was happy to tell the world that she could levitate. Several papers picked up her story in November 1938, stating that she “has repeatedly demonstrated that she



can stay suspended in the air,” but failed to enlarge on that with useful details. The (anonymous) *Daily Express* reporter¹⁸ who interviewed Alice in a trans-Atlantic phone call to her school, noted that she spoke “calmly in a Southern accent,” apparently more interested in describing her ancillary phenomena. “I can make tables move without touching them,” she said. There was mention of a 700lb (318kg) piano that moved at her command and which sometimes played tunes with no one near it. “Last January,” she said, “some of my friends and I were playing dominoes and we got tired, and I told the piano to play and it jst played.” This talent was far from being developed as evidenced by her comment: “I got it to play a wedding march once, but the darn thing stopped halfway through, and never did finish.”

There were, reportedly, many adult witnesses to her nascent abilities. Education Superintendent Dr HW Wright, when news of Alice was brought to his attention, had declared publicly: “Even if I saw it, I wouldn’t believe it.” His opinion changed after he had volunteered for her table-tipping demonstration. “At her command I have been thrown from tables several times,” he said. “Two others and myself, each weighing 15 stone [95kg], were thrown from a table one time. It was no gradual affair. It went up suddenly and dumped us on the floor.”

Alice confessed to the reporter that she “can float in the air, too. I float in the air a lot.” He asked her when she last floated. “It was last night. I touched the ceiling and then I came down.” We might suppose that Alice Kirby had been lying in bed



ABOVE: “Alice Bell Kirby, 13 (left) with her mother as they emerged from an Eastern Airlines flight from Jonesville, Louisiana to Newark, New Jersey, on 21 November 1938, to appear on a radio talk-show, a few days after international news reports [such as the one reproduced above] told of her ability to levitate and to make furniture fly and dance at her command.” *Acme Agency, USA, 21 Nov 1938.*

before “floating” up to the ceiling. The reporter asked whether this frightened her mother. “I guess so,” said Alice. “She don’t like it very much. It scares me a little too.”

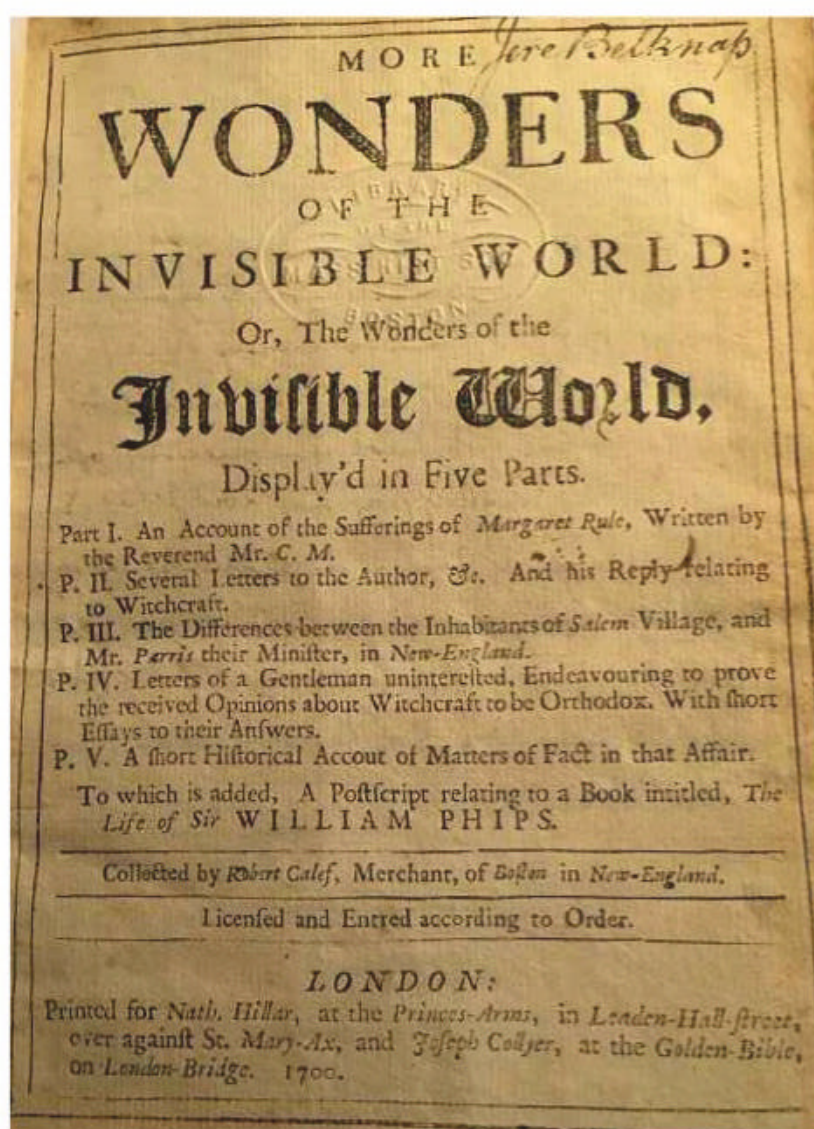
Hundreds of the curious trekked to the Kirby farmstead; while many readily attributed the phenomena to ghosts or spirits, Alice and her family offered no explanations at all. It is regrettable that she was not more thoroughly investigated, despite being invited to New York for that purpose by the famous stage magician Joseph Dunninger.¹⁹

Historically, the rising bed – complete with terrified incumbent – is a familiar element in poltergeist accounts throughout history. What is of interest here is that Alice Kirby seems to be a genuine case of someone spontaneously and without tutoring acquiring abilities that were, elsewhere, being manifested in séances across the Western world. Besides tilting and lifting tables, we are told that she could get ‘yes/no’ answers to questions from the way a table would tilt or make a knock, command the floor to vibrate, and animate a pencil to give correct answers to questions. But for the fact that she claimed responsibility, it could have been yet another poltergeist case.

RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

The levitations of 17-year-old Margaret Rule from her bed in Boston, Massachusetts, could have put her life in jeopardy. Unlike Alice Bell Kirby’s, hers were quite beyond her control. This was barely a few months after the last executions of ‘witches’ at Salem in 1692, and Margaret – a member of Cotton Mather’s Boston congregation – came to his attention by falling into a fit while attending Sunday prayers. Her bed became a stage on which she groaned and writhed, telling of things she saw far beyond the walls of her bedroom. Daily, parties of the curious and the pious came to gawp at her “exorbitant convulsions”, as Mather described them in his account of her “long-continued fastings”.²⁰

As proof of witchcraft, Mather produced the written testimony of six men who swore that the girl had floated upward off her bed and close to the ceiling. The chief witness, Samuel Aves, testified that: “I have seen Margaret Rule in her Afflictions from the Invisible World, lifted up from her Bed, wholly by an Invisible force, a great way towards the top of the Room where she lay; in her being so lifted, she had no Assistance from any use of her own Arms or Hands, or any other part of her Body, not so much as her Heels touching her Bed, or resting on any support whatsoever. And I have seen her thus lifted, when not only a strong Person hath thrown his whole weight across her to pull her down; but several other Persons have endeavoured, with all their might, to hinder her from being so raised up.”



Below this, three of the witnesses simply confirm “the substance of what is written above”. However, one Thomas Thornton adds (on behalf of himself and a William Hudson): “That one Evening when we were in the Chamber where Margaret Rule then lay, in her late Affliction, we observed her to be, by an Invisible Force, lifted up from the Bed whereon she lay, so as to touch the Garret Floor.” They observed her at close quarters for “several Minutes [and] it was as much as several of us could do, with all our strength to pull her down. All which happened when there was not only we two in the Chamber, but we suppose 10 or a dozen more.”

Struggling to resist a levitation reminds us of St Teresa of Avila’s descriptions of her

LEFT: The levitations of Margaret Rule led to a theological feud between Cotton Mather (below) and Robert Calef, author of *More Wonders of the Invisible World*.

own experiences. “I would very often resist and exert all my strength... but afterwards, I was worn out, like a person who had been contending with a giant.” At other times, “it was impossible to resist at all. My soul was carried away, and almost always my head with it, and now and then, the whole body as well, so that it was lifted up from the ground.” Once, during the visit of some dignitaries, when the feeling came upon her and she dreaded becoming a public spectacle, “I threw myself upon the ground, then the nuns came around to hold me, but still the rapture was observed.”²¹

Twenty-eight years before Margaret Rule, irresistible elevations afflicted Elizabeth, the 13-year-old daughter of Richard Hill of Stoke Trister in Somerset. Her family believed the girl’s “strange fits” were being caused by an old neighbour, the notorious witch Elizabeth Style. On the Monday night after Christmas 1663, a group of men failed to prevent the girl rising into the air. Seated, surrounded by the men, “she would rise out of her Chair, and raise her body about three or four foot high”. Sometimes, the chair went up with her. The narration says a group of four to six men “could not hold her down in a Chair in which she was sate, but that she would raise the Chair up in spight of their utmost force”.²²

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Nor was the lifting force any gentler with the young Alsatian brothers Thiebaut and Joseph Burner. When Olivier Leroy discovered them, he had already finished his book on levitation; but despite its Spiritualist context, he thought the case was important enough to include in an appendix.²³ He noted that the “possessed boys” were formally said by several eyewitnesses to have been actually lifted above the ground in several of their fits. He cites two accounts from the study made by Father Paul Sutter, who wrote from notes made by Prof. Lachemann and other investigators. Often the brothers were levitated together, one sitting in a chair, and the other “raised with him into the air, then fell down again with force on the floor; the chair would fly into a corner and the child into another.” Their mother “herself sitting by her child was thus lifted with him and flung into a corner without being hurt.”

A corroborating account was given by the Commander of Police at Illfurth, the town where they lived. “In February 1869, in the afternoon, I was with the children... Their mother seated them on chairs near the stove... I was about to leave the place, exchanging some words with M. Frindel, the

station-master, on the landing place, when we heard cries coming from the room. We hastily entered and saw Thiebaut lifted by a mysterious force and suspended 12 or 15 inches over his chair. He remained several minutes in this position. Everyone present was quite excited. A girl took hold of a holy water vessel and besprinkled the boy, who, after a short delay, started coming down again, with jerks, on to his seat. The parents and some bystanders whom I questioned told me that the same thing had already happened several times to the two boys.”²⁴ The Commander noticed that Thiebaut “looked exhausted” and “asked to be put to bed”.

I close with a case whose details the psychologist Nandor Fodor thought were “unprecedented”, and which Charles Fort called one of his “damnedest”: “A Mediterranean harbour – a man in a boat – down the Pansini boys flop into his boat.”²⁵

The boys he referred to were Alfredo Pansini and his brother Paolo. In 1901, when they were aged seven and five respectively, their father Signor Mauro Pansini (described variously as an architect or building contractor) moved into an old house close to the centre of Ruvo di Puglia, in the Apulia region of southern Italy.²⁶ Soon after their arrival, poltergeist phenomena broke out in the house, articles went flying, crockery smashed and extra food would appear which the family had not bought. According to reporters who talked to the family, Alfredo had accompanied adults to a Spiritualist séance several days before the manifestations began. Since then, he had been slipping into odd states of “sleepiness” in which he would declaim passages in French, Latin and Greek – languages that were “absolutely unknown to him” – “in a strange voice, like an orator”. Someone once recognised cantos of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* of which he was also said to be ignorant. The family were advised to pack Alfredo off to a boarding school in Bitonto, “where he passed two quiet years”.

Well, not quite. It seems that, while there, Alfredo gained a reputation for telepathy. If anyone looked at him, intending to ask a question – even if only half formed mentally – he wrote the answer unconsciously. One day, it seems that Alfredo, despite his own misgivings, was again brought to a Ouija séance, this time by three of his teachers. A message they received spelled the ‘spirit’s objection to the paper planchette they used. It asked for a triangular one made of wood. When told that none was available, it again spelled out that there was one in the kitchen. Indeed, one was found there, which the ‘communicator’ claimed had been made at a certain address in Bari. The address was later found to be a carpenter’s shop. Such details underline the mediumistic nature of Alfredo’s trances.

When Alfredo returned home in 1904, aged 10, a new series of phenomena commenced which also involved brother Paolo, now aged eight. According to reports, they would suddenly disappear and be found



While at school Alfredo gained a reputation for telepathy

a short time later at places 10 to 15 miles (16-24km) distant. The coastal towns of Molfeta, Bisceglie, Giovinazzo and Trani (strung out along 25 miles (40km) of the coast between Trani (12 miles/20km to the north of Ruvo), and Bari (23 miles/37km to the east), and Terlizzi and Mariotta (3 miles/5km to the east and 6 miles/10km south-east respectively) were mentioned, “from whence they had to be returned to Ruvo either by help of friends of the family or by means of the public authorities”.²⁷

One of these occasions was the odd incident mentioned by Fodor and Fort. I cite the account given by Dr Lapponi: “The Pansinis, wishing to dine at 12.30, sent little Paolo to fetch some wine. They waited a good half-hour for his return. At the end of that time [they] sent Alfredo to seek him. At one o’clock both boys found themselves in a boat on the sea near Barletta, just before Trinitapoli [some 28 miles/45km north-west]. The children began to cry, and then the boatman... turned back and made them disembark. A coachman who knew them, found them and took them back to Ruvo, where they arrived at 3.30 of the same day.”

Inevitably, news of these spontaneous relocations created great excitement and bewilderment locally. The Pansinis could only suppose that their boys had been cursed

LEFT: The cover of a German account of the Burner brothers’ possession shows 14-year-old Thiebaut Burner’s final and successful exorcism in the chapel at Illfurth in 1867. BELOW: Nandor Fodor.

or possessed and appealed to Monseigneur Pasquale Berardi, the bishop of Bitonto, to deliver their children from some unknown evil intention. While Mrs Pansini was talking to the bishop, both boys – who were close and within their sight – mysteriously disappeared from the room and were nowhere to be found until later.

We have further details of an incident that occurred during the afternoon of 9 November 1905. A local Jesuit priest in the town of Bari (23 miles/37km away) noticed two boys looking around like strangers. Seeing the priest, the boys went over to him and the eldest said that they were from “Ruvo di Puglia” and that “through the work and power of the Holy Spirit, were in Bari.” Thinking that a miracle had just taken place,²⁸ the priest immediately took the boys to Archbishop Vaccaro. He, in turn, accompanied the boys to the local police station, where he arranged for their return after some food and rest.

While they waited for some normal means of repatriation, police officer Mellusi decided to interview the boys. He spoke to them for “a long time” pressing them – even “threatening them, on purpose” – on the matter of how they “really” came to be in Bari, but they remained “imperturbable” and resolute in their belief “that they themselves did not know and that, therefore, it had to be divine”. At this point, the editor of the *Corriere delle Puglie* also interviewed the boys, but only the elder replied as “the younger does not want to talk”. It is worth giving in full as it probably ranks as the first ever press grilling of a teleporte.

Alfredo: *I don’t know how to explain what happen to me. What happens seems to be a succession of events without any reason, without cause. The change of place seems to happen before my eyes, with no one making it. And my own person, suddenly, is located in another place without knowing how and why.*

Editor: *And to what do you attribute that?*

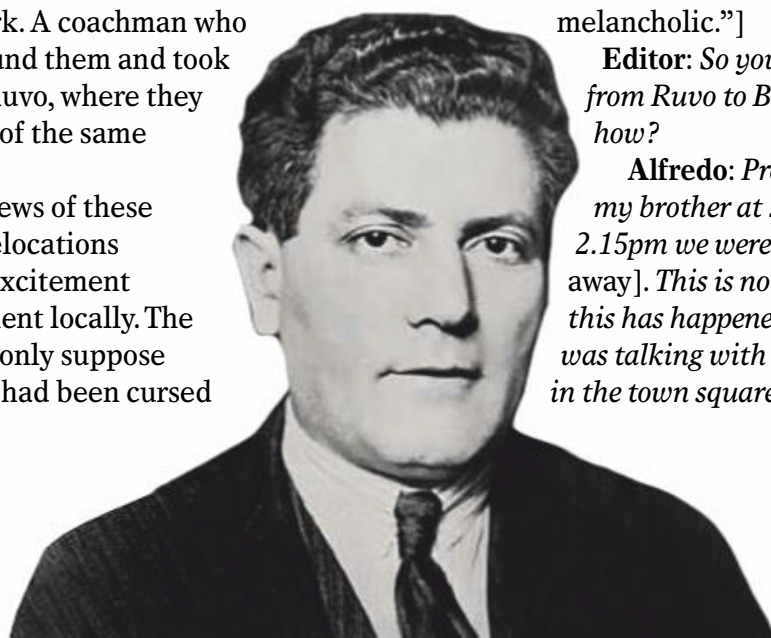
Alfredo: *To the Holy Spirit, I think.*

Editor: *Do you study?*

Alfredo: *Yes, in the seminary and I also attend the [third year] class of the gymnasium. I studied a lot and have always read the catechism religious books. [The Editor notes: “At this the boy’s eyes shone strangely, while his face took an expression sweetly melancholic.”]*

Editor: *So you found your way from Ruvo to Bari without knowing how?*

Alfredo: *Precisely: I was with my brother at 2pm in Ruvo and at 2.15pm we were both in Bari [37km away]. This is not the first time that this has happened to me. One day, I was talking with one of my teachers in the town square of Ruvo, at 1.35pm.*





ABOVE LEFT: The Piazza Matteotti, one of the main squares in Ruvo di Puglia. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A map of the coastal region around Ruvo, showing the town's position relative to a number of the locations to which the Pansini brothers appeared inexplicably to teleport, including Barletta, Molfetta, Bari, Bisceglie and Terlizzi.

Well, at 1.45pm, I found myself in my cousin's in Trani [20km to the north]. Another time I found myself in Molfetta [20km north-east]. A telegram was sent to Ruvo, and I was located by the police and taken back home.

Editor: *Maybe, you don't remember that you climbed on a train?*

Alfredo: *No, I didn't, because I hadn't any money.*

The *Corriere* editor, despite the sincerity of Alfredo's answers, chose to believe that it was "evidently a phenomenon of amnesia: the children came to Bari on foot, and in fact had very dusty shoes." For him, that was preferable to believing in miracles or some unidentified force behind teleportation. Dr Lapponi faced the same conservatism when he asked several Italian scientists to explain the Pansini phenomena. Those who actually responded to him, he wrote, proposed a "theory of 'ambulatory automatism'", supposing that the boys were moving about in a dissociated state of consciousness which they forget upon returning to normality. Dr Lapponi could not accept this. To say the least, he wrote, it did not explain how the boys ran many miles in such a short time and without anybody seeing them on the road. In one instance it was estimated at 30 miles (45km) in 15 minutes.

Certainly, Alfredo, despite his odd trances, always seemed to know where he was. How regrettable that he does not elaborate upon any sense of 'lapsed' time except for his dreamy observation that the "change of place" was "sudden" even as he looked on. It is clear from the statements of several close witnesses that Alfredo was frequently slipping into and out of trance-like states. He also had that talent for telepathy, answering by automatic writing questions sent to him mentally. This was a step up from poltergeist 'Morse code', but clearly a related phenomenon.

When Constable Mellusi interviewed Alfredo, he observed that the boy was easily distracted: "He frequently stared into space, as if absorbed in a vision."²⁹ Dr Lapponi quickly accepted that the boy was some kind of natural, involuntary medium, although it is clear he had also been exposed to some local forms of Spiritualism. When Lapponi asked the boy directly how the teleportations were made, the "spirit speaking through him [Alfredo] explained that he achieved the transportation by the dematerialisation of their bodies". Presumably, Alfredo had picked up some Spiritualist expressions from his attendance at séances.

SHARED MOTIFS

I am working towards the idea that the majority of poltergeist cases share a repertoire of characteristics, from which different accounts use different combinations at different times, and of which levitation and teleportation are among the rarest. We have already drawn attention to repetitions of the description that the elevating 'force' is powerful enough to overcome a number of strong men opposing it. Our protagonist's psychical predisposition may be shared with another relation, sometimes a number of them. With Mary Moses, it was her father; and Alice Bell Kirby said her grandmother had a similar ability. The hereditary or family link (whether this is genetic, or by some other means) is another flag of interest, but, along with the curious prominence of graveyards in these accounts we must leave it to be discussed at another time.

For now, it is enough to recognise some of the other intriguing elements shared by our stories. The dissociated state of our 'relocators' – especially the younger ones – was also noted by Fort, who wrote (in 1931) of the Pansinis: "If we accept that [they] ever were teleported, we note the mental effects

of the experience, in that they were in a state of profound hypnosis."³⁰ There is much more to be said on this particular subject.³¹

In his groundbreaking study of levitation accounts, the pioneering physicist Sir William Crookes pointed out that "The hereditary nature of [levitation] is shown by the Hungarian royal family producing five examples."³² Possibly the oldest recorded example we have of this hereditary 'mediumship' is that of St Philip the Evangelist (also called the Deacon), described as an exorcist "having four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy". Philip had himself experienced what could be interpreted as a teleportation when, after baptising an Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more... But Philip was found at Azotus."³³

Alfredo's reply to the final question put to him by the *Corriere* editor also brought out this point. Asked whether "these experiences are due to your excessive religious study?" Alfredo replied: "I don't think so, because [they also] happened to me when I was six years old."³⁴ [The transportations] have also happened to my brother, here present, and also, in the past to another brother before he went to military service."

I'd like to thank Kay Coggin for her dedicated news archive searches for undiscovered forteana; Chris Woodyard and Ulrich Magin for sharing; and Mike Dash and Simon Young for their help and advice.

Next month: Part Two – The Poltergeist Connection

🔗 **BOB RICKARD** started *Fortean Times* in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on forteana and strange phenomena.

NOTES

1 Carmen Blacker, 'Supernatural Abductions in Japanese Folklore', in *Asian Folklore Studies* (1967) vol.26, no.2, pp.112-147. Parts of her article were incorporated into 'The Visionary Journey', in *The Catalpa Bow* (1975). This theme is known in Japanese folklore as *kamigakushi*

2 Joshua Cutchin, *Thieves in the Night* (Anomalist Books, 2018); which I reviewed (**FT376:59-60**). For Cutchin on changelings, see **FT373:30-37**.

3 Poltergeist phenomena are inherently physical at the point of manifestation. A levitant is being moved through three-dimensional space, while a teleported seems to travel from A to B without traversing the intervening space in any 'normal' way, possibly via a qualitatively 'higher dimension'. I'm speaking hypothetically, assuming these phenomena are the result of authentic processes. If so, then at least part of the phenomenon involves work being done in physical terms, therefore measurable to some degree and perhaps even controllable. As Fort would say, the science of it would have to be more 'inclusive' than it appears today.

4 Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)), *Kidnapped* (1886), chapter 18.

5 See 'What is a Changeling?' on Simon Young's *Fairyist* website: www.fairyist.com. Cutchin, *op.cit.*, also deals with the subject.

6 Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880).

7 Edmund Jones (1702-1793), Welsh preacher, historian and geographer. *A geographical, historical, and religious account of the Parish of Aberystwith...* (1779) p.79.

8 Four-poster beds would often have a boarded 'roof' as a useful storage area.

9 *New York World*, 25 Mar 1883; cited by Fort in *Lo!* (1931) p.693

10 F de Homem Christo, *Le Parc du Mystere* (1923), cited by Camille Flammarion in *Haunted Houses* (1924). The full story is given on pp.159-168.

11 'Carried to a Grave', *Cincinnati Enquirer* (OH), 7 Jan 1900, p.16.

12 'Stolen by a Black Ghost', *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (IL), 22 Dec 1891.

13 'Alaska stirred by Witch Terror', *Jackson's Hole Courier*, Jackson, WY, 9 Aug 1917. Anthropologists have recorded that in Tlingit culture, inheritance of property is matriarchal. Also, children keep their mother's family name. This may have played a part in Mary's fears about the safety of her mother and grandmother.

14 TL Nichols, *A Biography of the Brothers Davenport* (1864), cited by Nandor Fodor in *Mind Over Space* (1962), p.69. We have to note that the Davenports were exposed many times using tricks during their stage acts. However, even sceptical investigators, like Joe Nickell (see his *Real-Life X-Files: Investigating the Paranormal* (2001), pp.18-27) have cautiously acknowledged that in Ira's private life, at least, there is some evidence to show that he was a practising Spiritualist. The question of whether his early Spiritualistic experiences were genuine is impossible to prove one way or the other at this remove. Their father, Ira Davenport Senior, also provided a full biography – *The Davenport Brothers: The World-renowned Spiritual Mediums: Their Biography and Adventures in Europe and America*, William White & Co., NY (1869).

15 Olivier Leroy, *Levitation* (1928) p.29. Cited from Richard's *Journal du magnétisme*, Nov 1840.

16 'Sister Nancy's Account to Jack', in *An Account of Some Strange Noises, &c. in The*

Rev. Mr. Wesley's House at Epworth, 1716-7, Collected by Mr. S. Wesley, pp.161-162. 'An Account of the Disturbances in my Father's House', by John Wesley (dated 26 March 1784) also appears in *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, ed. John Emory (7 vols., 1835) NY, vol.7, pp.474-478. Four years later, Jack decided to check on the facts. "When I was very young, I heard several letters read, wrote to my elder brother by my father, giving an account of strange disturbances which were in his house at Epworth, in Lincolnshire. When I went down thither, in the year 1720, I carefully inquired into the particulars. I spoke to each of the persons who were then in the house, and took down what each could testify of his or her own knowledge." A good analysis of the haunting is given by Simon Young on his strangehistory.net blog (6 Nov 2015).

17 'Strange Happenings at Gawler' in *Geraldton (WA) Guardian*, 7 May 1918. The reportage appeared nearly two weeks after the events, kept quiet deliberately by the concern of the local authorities involved over "public curiosity". A similar incident occurred in Hull, Yorkshire, in January 1939, to the Galyer family. It began with knocks and whistling, then the daughter and her mattress would be lifted up. "My wife, daughter and I got into one of the beds upstairs... the whole mattress was lifted up and dropped again with all three of us on it," said Mr Herbert Galyer. Both the daughter and son, aged six, complain of being "nipped" by invisible pins. 'Family driven to Distraction', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 6 Jan 1939.

18 *Daily Express*, 18 Nov 1938. According to a report the previous day, the other two local education officials thrown off tables with Dr Wright were Charles Elkins, the parish Education Supervisor, and Alice's Principal FH Shiel, none of whom were able to offer any explanation for her phenomena. *Coshocton (OH) Tribune*, 17 Nov 1938.

19 On reading these news reports, the famous magician Joseph Dunninger, as chairman of the Universal Council of Psychic Research, invited Alice to come to New York to demonstrate her feats to a group of investigators. She went, accompanied by her mother, but I have not yet found any account of her testing in New York. *Nevada State Journal*, Reno, NV, 19 Nov 1938.

20 The case of Margaret Rule became the theological battleground between the Mathers and Robert Calef, a merchant, each side publishing critiques of the other's assessments and, in particular, their differing definitions of what constituted witchcraft. A detailed analysis of the Mathers-Calef feud is given by Allen Putnam in *Witchcraft of New England Explained by Modern Spiritualism* (1880), 2nd edition (Boston, 1881). Aves's letter is reprinted in many sources. I used George Lincoln Burr, ed., *Narratives of the New England Witchcraft Cases* (1914), p.337; Samuel Gardner Drake, *The Witchcraft Delusion in New England: Its Rise, Progress, and Termination* (1866), vol.2; reprinted (London, 2013), pp.68-69. It's quite possible that Calef's challenge to Mathers, which brought some sanity to the proceedings, saved Margaret from fatal condemnation.

21 *Life of St Teresa*, 5th edition, ch.20, pp.160-163. By 'rapture' she means her ecstatic elevation.

22 From 'Relation 3', in J Glanvill, *Saducismus triumphatus* (1681), p.129; online at Early English Books: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A42824.0001.001/1:19.3?rgn=div2;view=fullt> ext. Style faced many charges including murder by witchcraft. She was found guilty at Taunton

Assizes but "prevented Execution by dying in Gaol". The description "six Men could not hold her down in a chair" is taken from a statement given under oath to the judge Robert Hunt, on p.139. To determine levitation proper we can only wish the description was more precise.

23 Olivier Leroy, *Levitation* (1928), Appendix 2, p.255.

24 Abbé P Sutter, *Le diable, ses paroles, son action dans les possees d'Illfurt, etc.*, 4th ed., (Arras, 1926).

25 Fort, *Lo!*, ch.18. Nandor Fodor, *Mind Over Space* (1962), pp.65-69.

26 I have reconstructed the background to this case from the following sources. A summary of the investigation by Dr Giuseppe Lapponi (1851-1906, a Professor of Practical Anthropology in Rome and one-time chief physician to Popes Leo XIII and Pius X) in his *Hypnotism and Spiritism: A Critical and Medical Study* (1907), pp.128-133, originally published in Italian in 1897. Dr Lapponi had interviewed members of the Pansini family and obtained accounts from senior and local clergy in the region, and others mentioned in reports as witnesses, including the policeman and news editor. Other sources used include contemporary reportage in the *Corriere delle Puglie*, 10, 15, 21, 23, 25 Nov 1905; Fort's citation is from the *Occult Review*, 4-17; and Fodor's citation from the *Giornale d'Italia*, 15 Nov 1905.

27 It may be significant, somehow, that this area borders upon the region of southern Italy that was home to St Joseph of Copertino (1603-1663), one of the best documented and most prolific levitators on record, among several others.

28 This account was published in the regional newspaper *Corriere delle Puglie* on 10 Nov 1905. Credit for retrieval of this and related news-reports: Arcangelo Cassano, Giorgio Abraini, Andrea Bovo, Ciccio D'Agostino and Edoardo Russo. NB: Alice Bell Kirby was also interviewed by the Press, but three decades later; see note 16.

29 Officer Mellusi's words translate literally as "having an eye on top". I assume this corresponds to the English phrase "staring into space". NB: Similar language was used to describe the distant, dreamy expression of the 'floating' baby from Bracken County, mentioned above; see note 11.

30 Fort, *op.cit.*, ch.19.

31 Other examples were given in my two-part article, 'Transportation by an Invisible Power': the Irish butler in part one, (**FT366:44-50**) and Mary Longdon in part two (**FT367:46-51**). Dr Moore was in my article 'The Taking of Dr Moore... and His Return' (**FT351:40-46**).

32 Other writers who have referred to Hungarian royalty usually mention only the two or three most famous: King Stephen (978-1038), Princesses Margaret (1242-1270) and Elizabeth (1297-1338). That Crookes could bump this figure up to five shows the level of detail and persistence in his research into the subject. See: 'Human Levitation: Illustrating Certain Historical Miracles' in *The Quarterly Journal of Science, and Annals of Mining, Metallurgy, Engineering, Industrial Arts, Manufactures, and Technology*, vol.5, (Jan 1875), pp.31-61.

33 Philip's teleportation is in *Acts of the Apostles* 8:39-40; and his daughters mentioned in *Acts* 21:9. Azotus is today's Ashdod.

34 This would have been in 1900, a year before the Pansini family moved to Ruvo.

THE MASKED WALKER

Why did an Englishman declare he would wear an iron helmet and push a perambulator around the world? Who was this masked man – and did he get any further than Royston? **JAN BONDESON** tells the strange story of the Masked Walker – hyperpedestrian or hoaxer?

By far the strangest individual in the annals of human hyperpedestrianism made his bow to the London press on New Year's Day 1908.

On the morning of 1 January, a man known only as the Masked Walker gave interviews to the press, standing in Trafalgar Square wearing an iron mask from an old suit of armour and wheeling a large, old-fashioned perambulator. He explained to the journalists that, the previous year, he'd had an argument with a friend of his, an American millionaire, at his club in Pall Mall. The American had said that under no circumstances would an Englishman be able to walk around the world masked and wheeling a perambulator. The Masked Walker had accepted the wager of \$100,000, and lost no time in equipping himself for the long tramp ahead. The rich American had persuaded a fellow countryman of his to accompany the Walker, to act as his 'minder' and to make sure that the Englishman really did walk around the world, visiting a long list of places at home and abroad. He would have always to wear his iron mask, and no person would be allowed to see his face. He would start his journey penniless, he explained to the journalist, but his perambulator was full of pamphlets about his ambitious project and postcards with his picture on them, which he would sell to the public during his journey. One of the stipulations of his wager was that he should find a wife while on the road: she must be between 25 and 30 years old, he said, well educated, of even temper, and with some knowledge of music.

A large crowd followed the Masked Walker as he called out "Good-bye! See you in 10 years!" and pushed his perambulator along Fleet Street and Cannon Street, over London Bridge, and down the Old Kent Road. In Dartford, he was nabbed by a police constable for selling postcards without a pedlar's certificate, and appeared at the Dartford Police Court wearing his iron helmet; the outcome was that he was fined half a crown. On one of my postcards of the Walker, stamped and posted in



LEFT: The pamphlet sold by the Masked Walker, containing his impressive itinerary. **FACING PAGE:** A postcard of the Walker, stamped and posted in Sittingbourne, Kent, on 16 January 1908.

was £21,000 in British money; if he lost, he would forfeit £5,000. He was confident that he would find a wife en route, and settle on her the sum of £500 per annum, since he was a gentleman of means. He would greatly have liked to appear in the music-halls, but was prevented by the stipulation that he would subsist only from the sale of his postcards and pamphlets.

The Masked Walker went on to Teignmouth, Torquay, Dartmouth and Penzance. At the time of his next interview, in the *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, he claimed to have found a wife, who accompanied him on his journey in a caravan; he did not introduce her to the journalist. The sturdy, moustachioed 'minder' was still accompanying him, and they both slept in the caravan at night. Since he found the heavy iron mask irksome, the Walker wore a silken replica

while indoors. From his headquarters at the Golden Lion Hotel in Penzance, he bragged about his wager, his scrapbook full of souvenirs collected during his journey, and his wife waiting for him in the caravan. This was his first visit to Cornwall, and he was enjoying himself. The journalist described him as a sturdy and well set-up man, and his conversation was said to betray the fact that he possessed considerable education and culture. The sale of his postcards exceeded all precedents, and he would have to replenish his stock while in Penzance.

In April 1908, the Walker passed through Weymouth and Bridgwater, and by mid-May he was in Woking. In early June, he was in Chelmsford, where he was interviewed by a representative of the *Essex County Chronicle*. His plan was to proceed northwards through Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Newcastle to reach Scotland, he said. He remained in good spirits and was optimistic about his wager, although he anticipated trouble in China, where the natives were once more

One stipulation was that he should find a wife while on the road

Sittingbourne on 16 January, is the following message: "This cove arrived in Sittingbourne to day. No one is allowed to see his face, & is walking round the world for a wager..." On 15 February, the Walker was in Brighton, and on 14 March, he walked into Exeter. Interviewed by a *Western Times* journalist at the Half Moon Hotel, he showed off his new pram, fitted with pneumatic tyres, which he had purchased after the first one had broken down. If he won his wager with the American millionaire, he would get \$100,000, which



LEPARD
CROYDON

restless. On 13 June, he entered Ipswich, and on 9 July he was in Royston, Hertfordshire, but this is the last certain observation of him, apart from an unconfirmed sighting at Woburn Sands in late September 1908.

WHO WAS THE WALKER?

A great deal of nonsense has been written about the Masked Walker, both on the Internet and in various newspapers. His story has been told by the *Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*, as well on the website kept by Mr Ken McNaught, who claims to be the Walker's great-grandson.

The identity of the Walker is revealed as Harry Bensley, a wealthy rake and adventurer in Edwardian times, who supplied his services when the American millionaire John Pierpont Morgan and the 5th Earl of Lonsdale decided on a wager that an Englishman could not walk around the world, wearing an iron mask and wheeling a perambulator. According to one version of the story, Bensley had lost heavily while gambling, and he preferred his walking adventure to being reduced to a bankrupt. The *Daily Mail* boldly states that Bensley 'ticked off' all the British towns on his list, and several in America and Australia, and that he was in Italy in 1914 at the outbreak of the Great War, deciding to call off his bet in order to return home to Blighty and join the Army.

The problem with this account is that after he left Ipswich in June 1908, having completed nearly six months of tramping the English roads, there are no trustworthy sightings of the Masked Walker. Surely,



the fun-loving Northerners, the sarcastic Scots and the jolly Irishmen would have appreciated the novelty of seeing the Walker passing through their main towns and cities just as well as the Southerners and West Countrymen had done in early 1908. And surely, this ludicrous figure, wearing an iron helmet and wheeling a perambulator, would have been interviewed in the local newspapers. Nor would the American and Australian newspaper have failed to tell the story of this extraordinary bet; after all,

ABOVE LEFT: The Masked Walker and his minder.

they had covered the movements of George M Schilling, just a few years earlier, in some detail (see FT376:36-37). No, the only explanation can be that very soon after going through Ipswich in June 1908, the Masked Walker 'chickened out' of his alleged wager, put aside his helmet and perambulator, and returned to obscurity.

BENSLEY THE BIGAMIST

It turns out that Harry Bensley really did exist, although the descriptions of him as a successful businessman and investor, or as a dashing rake and adventurer, are greatly exaggerated. Harry Bensley Elmer was born out of wedlock in Thetford, Norfolk, the son of housekeeper Susannah Elmer. On his birth certificate, the father's name was given as Harry Bensley, labourer in a saw mill. Harry Bensley Elmer had two elder siblings, Louisa and James, and three younger ones, Alice,

Lily Emma and Peter. It is strange but true that after fathering six children with his long-term mistress Susannah Elmer, Harry Bensley Sr married her in 1884, making an honest woman of her at last and allowing the children to take the name Bensley.

Young Harry Bensley found himself in big trouble in 1890, when he was accused of burning some stacks of hay and barley belonging to the Thetford butcher FT Hubbard. The boy had been seen nearby, and it was he who had given the alarm when



ABOVE LEFT: The Masked Walker outside the Dartford Police Court, from the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 11 January 1908. ABOVE RIGHT: A newspaper photograph of the Masked Walker, from the *Western Times*, 20 March 1908.

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK



MANY MEN WOULD NOT MIND PARTING WITH THEIR MOTHERS-IN-LAW.



BUT THIS WOULD BE THE MOST SATISFACTORY THING TO DO.

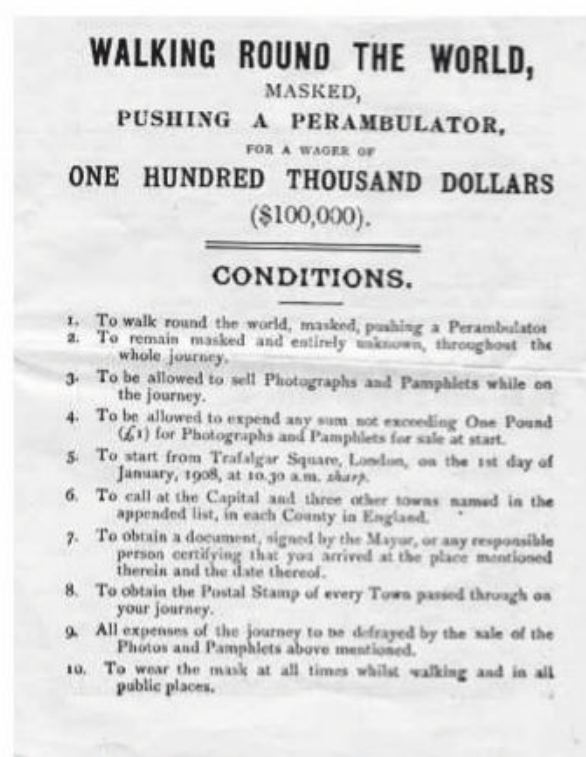
ABOVE: Two caricatures of the Masked Walker, from the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1 February 1908. BELOW: Wager conditions, as laid out in Bensley's pamphlet.

the fire was discovered. There was strong suspicion against him, and he was committed to stand trial for arson at the Suffolk Winter Assizes, held at the Ipswich Shirehall, before Mr Justice Hawkins. However, it was pointed out that his master had given him an excellent character, that no person had actually seen him set anything alight, and that the fire might well have been accidental. After a favourable summing-up from Mr Justice Hawkins, Harry was acquitted. In August 1898, he married Kate Green in Thetford; according to their marriage certificate, they were both 21 years old, and Harry worked as a labourer. The 1901 Census has them living at 34 Woodside Avenue, Croydon – the house still stands – with their two little daughters Alice Susannah and Lily Edith. Harry was described as a general labourer, and clearly had paid employment.

In 1902 or thereabouts, Bensley proved to be a scoundrel, deserting his family and setting himself up as a con artist in London. He told two businessmen named James Bradley and Thomas Jordan that he was one Harry Burrell, the son of Sir Robert Burrell of Thetford, and heir to extensive estates in Norfolk, although he could not raise money on the property on account of the terms of the will. The two credulous businessmen lent him a total of £367, but after they found out that they had been imposed upon, they went to the police.

Harry absconded to South Africa, but a police detective apprehended him in Cape Town, and in late September 1904, he was remanded on charges of obtaining money by false representations at the Willesden Police Court. It also turned out that Harry had been up to further mischief before leaving for South Africa. In June 1902, when he had been working as a carman, he had met the young Norwood barmaid Lilian Clapham, and introduced himself as Harry Burrell, a young man of great expectations who was

He said he was due to inherit a fortune and a large estate



due to inherit a fortune and a large Norfolk estate. When they had known each other for just over three weeks, he asked her to marry him, and she accepted. They lived together for a while, but when Lilian got pregnant, she insisted that they should get married. And indeed, 'Harry Burrell' married Lilian Clapham at the Marylebone registry office on 5 February 1903. Since his inheritance had not yet come through, as he explained it, he had to work as a keeper at a private

asylum in St Albans. Lilian gave birth to a child in April 1903, and she continued to live with Harry until December that year. She started to get suspicious when she found Harry's marriage certificate from his earlier marriage to Kate Green, but he said this had just been a joke, and not a legal marriage by any means; he had bribed the registry people, and used an assumed name. When Harry had absconded to South Africa, the trusting Lilian had come with him, but when they were brought back to London, the truth about his bigamous activities eventually emerged.

On trial at the Old Bailey for obtaining money by false pretences, Bensley pleaded guilty. He denied feloniously marrying Lilian Clapham, however, but the prosecution had had time to find some very inconvenient witnesses. Mrs Lily Mobsby, of Thetford, said that she had been present at the registry office when the prisoner had married Kate Green on 6 August 1898, and she had subsequently seen them living in Thetford as man and wife. A neighbour, Mrs Rose Smith, had seen Harry and Kate living together at 34 Woodside Avenue, Croydon, and later at 3 Anthony Road, South Norwood, with their two children. Lilian Clapham, described in the *Daily Telegraph* as a sad-faced young lady dressed in black, was also present in court to tell her pathetic story. Detective Sergeant George Cole said that after Bensley had left his first wife, she had found out about the bigamous marriage and sold the family house to be able to support her children. Bensley, described as a weak-faced young man wearing gold-rimmed glasses, said that he had tried in vain to find his first wife after she had deserted him with the children and sold up their family home. He had then met Miss Clapham and fallen in love with her; after she had quarrelled with her father, who did not like the bounder 'Burrell', she said



ABOVE: A postcard of the Masked Walker, with a woman (his wife?) and the inevitable minder.

that she would never go home to her parents again, and he felt honour-bound to provide her with a roof over her head. He had not thought he was committing any crime when he later married her. Bensley was found guilty and sentenced to two terms of imprisonment of four years penal servitude, to run concurrently.

THE GREAT MASKED MAN HOAX

In December 1908, Harry Bensley himself told the story of 'The Great Masked Man Hoax' in an obscure publication called *Answers to Correspondents on Every Subject*. In spite of absconding to South Africa, he had been sentenced to several years of penal servitude at the Old Bailey. When he was due for release in November 1907, he was very worried about the future, as he had no job or trade and his sole worldly possession

would be the gratuity of 30 shillings. He had read a book about the Man in the Iron Mask, the mysterious French 17th century state prisoner, and thought he might just as well spend the remainder of his miserable life with an iron mask covering his face. These gloomy musings inspired him to think up the 'Great Masked Man Hoax': might it not be profitable to invent a story about a bet with an American millionaire, and a plan to walk around the world wheeling a perambulator? He confided in a German criminal who was also due to be released very soon, and this individual was sworn into the plot, agreeing to act the part of the 'minder' and to finance the purchase of the iron helmet and perambulator, as well as the printing of a supply of pamphlets and postcards. Harry and the German made good progress planning the hoax, and on

1 January, everything was ready for the scheme to be set in motion. Cheered by the newspaper interest in the fictitious wager, a photograph of himself and the 'minder' in the *Daily Mirror*, and by the enormous crowds following him through the London streets, Harry walked on all day until 9.30pm, not having eaten since breakfast. When summoned before the Dartford Police Court a few days later for selling postcards without a license, he was fearful that the hoax would meet with a premature end; but after his solicitor had explained the stipulations of the bet, he was allowed to wear his mask in court, and to use the alias 'Henry Mason'. The newspaper interest continued, and some gullible young men were persuaded to purchase a third of the prize money for £5. Bensley arranged for his 'wife' Lilian Clapham to meet him in a caravan he had hired, and for a while he was quite content to walk through the West Country. But the cumbersome iron mask and the large and heavy perambulator were a heavy cross to bear for the exhausted walker, who suffered from debilitating headaches. Having left Ipswich and proceeded north as far as Wolverhampton, he quietly slid away from notoriety, removed his mask and rejoined the rest of humanity.

Thus runs the remarkable confession of the crook and bigamist Harry Bensley, who would never do anything newsworthy again after the Great Masked Man Hoax. Taught a lesson by the harsh sentence back in 1904, he was never again convicted for any con trick, nor did he add to his tally of wives. When he joined the Army as a private soldier in November 1915, he correctly described himself as being 39 years and two months old, a married man living in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire, and working as an asylum attendant. He is said to have been invalided out of the Army after a year. Later in life, he lived off various odd jobs, being a cinema doorman, a YMCA warden, and twice a counsellor for Labour in Wivenhoe, Essex. During the Second World War, he was fit enough to work as a bomb checker at an ammunitions factory. On 21 May 1956, Harry Bensley died at his bedsitting room at 42 Riley Road, Brighton, at the age of 79; a woman said to have been his wife was present at the time, and one may wonder whether this was the faithful Lilian Clapham, who had 'stood by her man' until the very end.

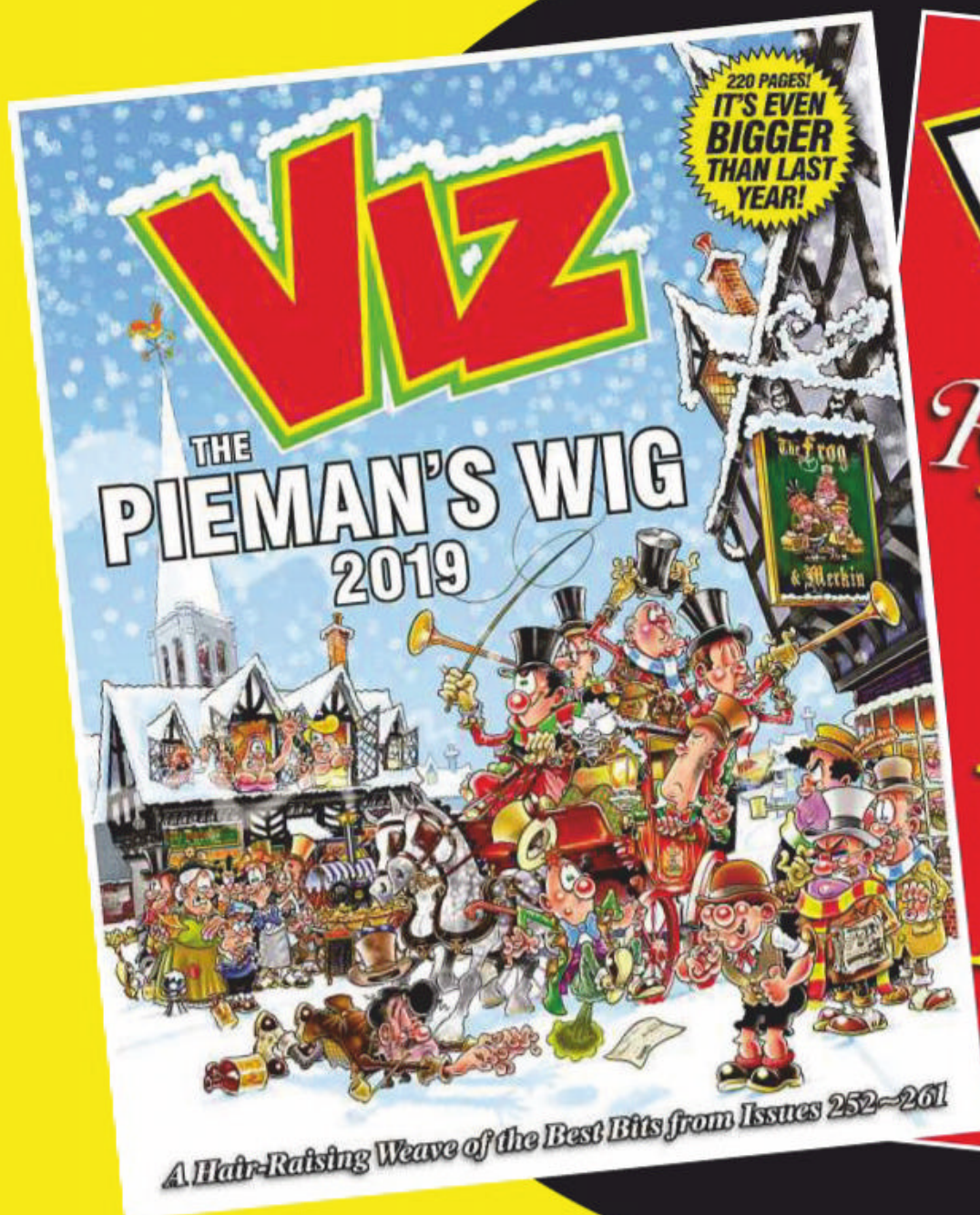


This is an extract from Jan Bondeson's book *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* (Amberley Publishing, Stroud 2018).

JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, and a regular contributor to FT. His latest books are *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* and *Phillimore's Edinburgh*, both from Amberley Publishing.

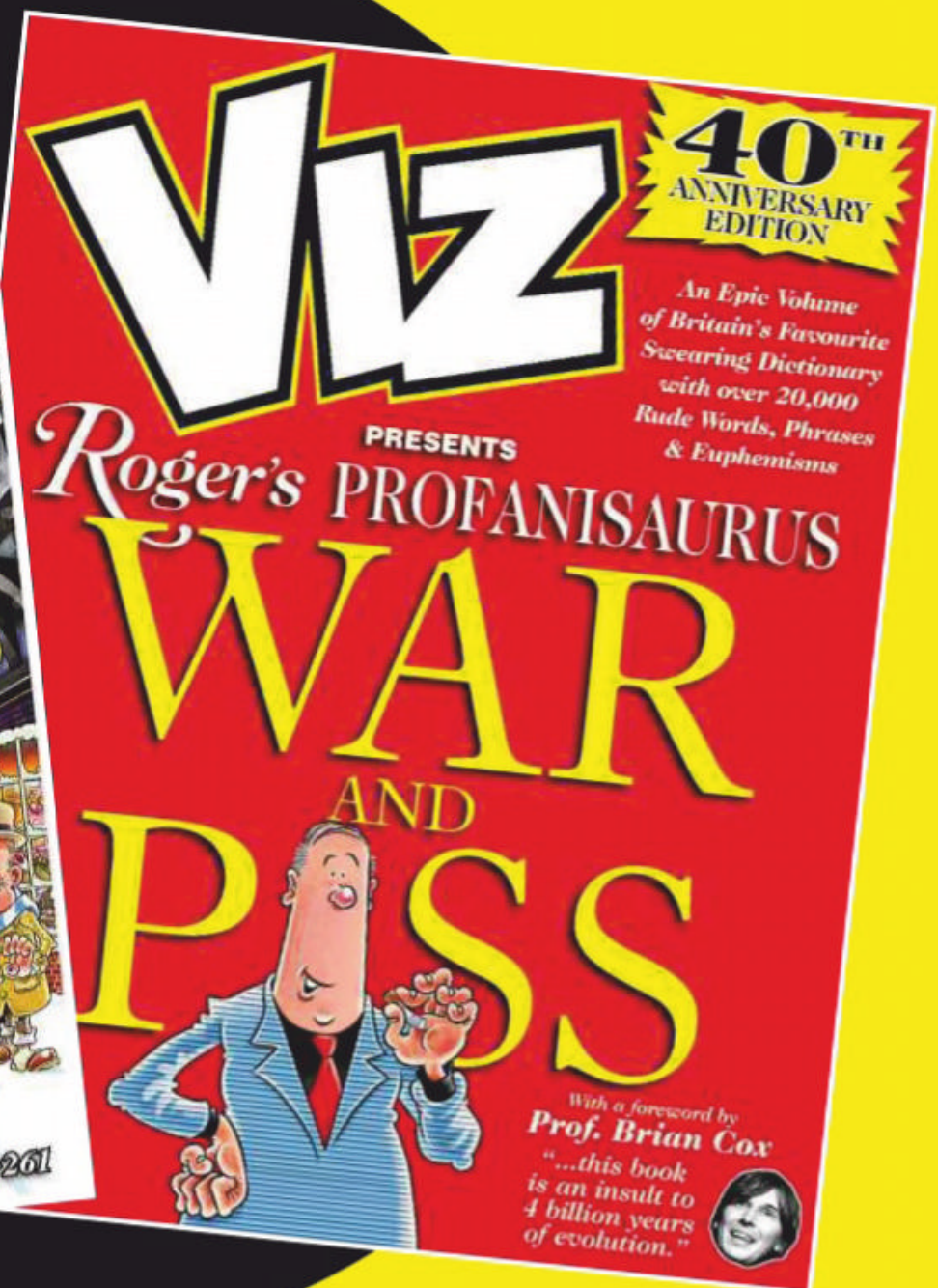


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MAKING ALBION HUM

JOHN MICHELL REMEMBERED

Ten years ago this April, John Michell died and Britain lost its modern Merlin. On the anniversary of Michell's death, **PHIL BAKER** celebrates the radical traditionalist and his unique body of work, while **STEVE MARSHALL** offers a previously unpublished poetic tribute...

I once met a famous man. I had no idea who he was, and our meeting could be described as inconsequential at best, but I knocked on a door and it was opened by a polite, kindly mannered individual who had been the Merlin of the 1960s. It was John Michell, the man who opened up a peculiarly green and English New Age vision encompassing 'ley lines', lost ancient wisdom, and flying saucers over mystic Albion. It was Michell who took Keith Richards and Anita Pallenberg on a country quest to look for UFOs, and who sparked a new interest in Stonehenge and Glastonbury. In the words of Sixties chronicler Barry Miles, "the King's Road led straight to Glastonbury in those days", and this was largely due to Michell.

In 1967 Michell published *The Flying Saucer Vision: The Holy Grail Restored*, a book of the zeitgeist. Pink Floyd released *Saucerful of Secrets* the following year, the Chelsea boutique Hung On You was decorated with saucer imagery, there was the psychedelic UFO Club on Tottenham Court Road, and David Bowie came on the scene a little later with 'Starman'.

Michell became 'flying saucer correspondent' for the underground newspaper the *International Times*, and even stated his case in the more establishment pages of the BBC magazine *The Listener*. Michell's saucers were not the menacing extraterrestrials of Cold War sci-fi movies, but benevolent portents of new ways of thinking and being; his take on them was inspired by Jung, who saw them as symbols of psychological change. It seemed that the tower on Glastonbury Tor was a centre of UFO activity, and Craig Sams (an LSD enthusiast of the time, who went on to found Green & Black's chocolate) remembers: "I didn't see a flying saucer until October 1967



LEFT: John Michell with a measure of the megalithic yard, from a portrait by Maxwell Armfield.

are in the fields and up come the UFOs... they were definitely there. They were in classic cigar-shaped mother-ship form. Little lights emanating..."

After *The Flying Saucer Vision* came a 1968 single-issue magazine, *Albion*, and an even more influential book, *The View Over Atlantis* (1969). There was speculation that UFOs might be powered by unconventional energies, perhaps musical or magnetic, with the magnetism possibly involving straight pathways of energy in the Earth itself; it was said that UFOs navigated in straight lines. In this second book the lines themselves became central, leading Michell to speculate on sacred lines in the landscape, like the 'dragon lines' of ancient China and, most famously, 'ley lines': straight alignments across miles of British countryside, along which an ancient civilisation had supposedly placed its shrines and monuments. This had been suggested by Alfred Watkins in his 1922 book *The Old Straight Track*, a book that became immensely popular 50 years later, thanks to Michell. Suddenly it was revealed that the countryside was full of secretly harmonious patterns and energies, and not just the countryside: "Carnaby Street is a happy place," says a girl in a 1970 book, *Carnaby Street*; "I think it must be on dragon lines."

The View Over Atlantis took off from old straight tracks to include Druids, Aborigine songlines, the Earth Spirit, and the 'Astrological Garden', or cosmic landscaping. The Great Pyramid was central, along with Stonehenge and Glastonbury (all three being connected, according to the book). "He set me up, really," said Michael Eavis, the farmer who founded the Glastonbury

Michell's saucers were benevolent portents of new ways of thinking

when I went to Glastonbury... John Michell, who had just written *The Flying Saucer Vision*, was camping down there... So here we

Festival, speaking of Michell. The stage at the first Glastonbury festival was a pyramid, a scaled-down model of the Great Pyramid of Cheops.

There had already been rumours of pyramids at Glastonbury – “the lost pyramids of Glastonbury that flanked the burial place of Arthur”, as Iain Sinclair writes in *Lud Heat*, his 1975 essay on the supposedly murder-inducing churches of Hawkmoor and their sinister alignments. *Lud Heat* itself is a classic document of its time: the era of ‘earth mysteries’, ley lines, and the psychic power of old stone. Without Michell, no *Lud Heat*, and without *Lud Heat* no *Hawkmoor*, Peter Ackroyd’s bestseller that picked up the Hawkmoor theme a few years later.

Michell was also a late Sixties friend of the novelist Bruce Chatwin, with whom he spent days of walking and talking across the landscapes of Cornwall and Wales. Looking back on the whole business of leys, Michell wrote: “From the fairy paths of Celtic folklore to the sacred dragon lines of old China, secret, mystical ways across the landscape are known to exist throughout the world.” Disclaiming any definite knowledge, he noted there had been many theories, involving earth energies, UFOs, ancient astronomers and priests, and then credited Chatwin with following “the most suggestive clues... His insight was that leys had their origin in tribal nomadic society, and this took him to Australia in quest of the fabled songlines or creation paths of aboriginal mythology. The paths, he said, are invisible, but the tribespeople can discern them through the spirit which animates them. He did not put this in his *Songlines* book for fear of upsetting the literary people.”

INFLUENCES

Michell’s influence ripples through Chatwin and even indirectly Ackroyd, but he had his own influences and sources, notably Charles Fort and Plato. Philosophy was a consolation when he lost his fortune. He came from a fairly conventional wealthy background, born in 1933 and brought up in his family’s Hampshire mansion, the attractively named Stargroves, later bought by Mick Jagger. Head boy at prep school, he went to Eton and Cambridge before training as a Royal Navy Russian interpreter. Arriving in London, however, he seems to have been relieved of much of his inheritance by property sharks, and threw himself into Soho and the Bohemian world of the Mandrake club and the Colony Room.

Those celebrated Sixties winds of change were blowing, though, and new scenes were rising: as well as the *International Times*, Michell became involved with the gipsy caravan revivalists who travelled the country lanes with Sir Mark Palmer’s convoy, and the Chelsea ‘hippyocracy’ centred on Cheyne Walk. It was a privileged milieu, an aspect of the Sixties nicely caught by the more socially concerned writer David Widgery, who worked as a doctor



COURTESY GABI NASEMAN

ABOVE: Land’s End, 1971 with Gabi Naseman and friends. John is immediately to the left of the stone.
BELOW: The revised 1983 edition of *The View Over Atlantis*: tracks, alignments and a distant pyramid.



in the East End: “All you need is love, but a private income and the sort of parents who would have a Chinese smoking jacket in the attic help.” It was at Cheyne Walk that a journalist asked Michael Rainey – proprietor of Hung On You boutique, and a key mover on the scene – who was going to run the hospitals if everyone dropped out. “We were all eager to hear how Michael would deal with this disagreeably sensible question,” Michell remembered, “and his answer did not disappoint us. ‘In the coming future, no one will be ill’.”

Michell had meanwhile discovered drugs. As he modestly puts it, most of his

contemporaries had “made it” and were successful, “so they don’t know what it’s like for a failure aged 30 to become an acid freak. It was marvellous”. Suddenly, “a head stuffed full of liberal, academic nonsense was spun around, and new patterns of thought appeared, far more natural and interesting than any which had been offered by the education process. I felt sorry for the victims of education, so I wrote a book for them, *The Flying Saucer Vision*... The book was savagely reviewed by those critics who were kind enough to notice it, and every subsequent book I have written has, I am proud to say, received the same treatment.”

More than LSD, it was Platonism that buoyed up a mind which ascended naturally towards the beauties of number, geometry, and eternal harmonies. This was what Michell meant by philosophy, very different from what A J Ayer might have meant by it. Michell is in the tradition of the English Platonists such as Thomas Taylor and Kathleen Raine, seeing them as links in a ‘golden chain’ by which true philosophy survives.

Michell’s other great philosophical beacon was Fort, and his sceptical writing on mysteries, anomalies and the nature of belief. As we know, Fort was interested in the material that orthodox science needs to exclude, and he mined his way through scientific journals and old newspapers looking for it, first in the New York Public Library and then in the British Library. “There are millions of persons who would think this a dreary existence,” he wrote. “But the challenges – the excitements – the finds.” The finds included showers of frogs, poltergeists, mystery disappearances,



LEFT: The writer at work in 2008.

miracles, and objects in the sky.

Far from being gullible, Fort developed an agnostic stance towards the nature of reality itself, whereby he could believe in virtually anything – up to a point – in a way that makes dogmatism impossible. He was sceptical about intellectual constructs, saying, “I cannot accept that the products of minds are subject-matter for beliefs” and that he could “conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while”.

Michell observed that many people think of themselves as fortune tellers because they are interested in UFOs or Loch Ness or fabled lost cities, despite the fact that Fort invested no more in these, individually, than he did in Darwinism or Christianity. Instead, said Michell, fortune teller thinking should open us up to “the full range of glorious uncertainties that make up existence”, and make us “better informed, more tolerant citizens of the universe”.

SYNCHRONICITIES

One of the best-known subjective mysteries is that of coincidence, theorised by Jung in terms of ‘synchronicity’ – involving connections which are meaningful but can’t, by any process we understand, be causally related. Michell liked to cite the case of a woman he knew who was in a café as a child with her father, when a man walked in. Her father immediately recognised this man as someone he’d known in the army and hadn’t seen for many years, jumping up to greet him – only to realise it wasn’t the right man. “So he sat down disappointed. But then another man came in. And this time it really was his old friend from the army.”

What it ‘means’, if anything, is another matter. But Michell felt that in general coincidence was a good thing – “it means

Michell felt that in general terms coincidence was a good thing

that you are in tune with life and going in the right direction” – and he discovered, as others have, that the more you become attuned to coincidences and synchronicities in your own life, the more they seem to happen. One way of inducing them is to keep a ‘coincidence diary’, which Michell found stimulating (“If you ever feel that life is boring, try noting down your minor coincidences. You will be amazed how quickly they increase, and the adventures they land you in”) but eventually overstimulating. If he thought of someone, they would call or write; previously unencountered words would suddenly bounce up two or three times; lost objects would appear again in the places where they should have been all along; randomly encountered books – thanks to the ‘library angel’ effect – virtually leapt into his hands, falling open at the most relevant page; and crossword clues began giving personal messages.

That way madness lies. At any rate, “life became so nervously intense that I grew tired of it, gave up the diary, and sank back into normality”. Some of Michell’s thoughts on coincidence can be found in *Unexplained Phenomena*, the book he co-authored with FT founder Bob Rickard.

ECCENTRICITIES

My acquaintance with Michell’s books began with *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions* (1984), a collection of unusual thinkers starting with Woodcock Carden: ‘Woodcock’, so-called, after the game bird with the zig-zag flight, because he was difficult to shoot. He was a 19th-century Irish landlord, and his tenants were always taking shots at him (on one occasion he caught two of them and saw them hanged for attempted murder) but by the end of his life the tenants were cheering him in the street.

Woodcock Carden became a folk hero after his unrequited love for the young Eleanor Arbuthnot. He served two years hard labour after a bungled attempt to abduct her, but his devotion won the public’s heart (with just a few dissenting voices; one newspaper editorial commented that Carden was less in need of a wife and more in need of a straitjacket). Women waved handkerchiefs at his trial, and he became the subject of poems and songs. He seems to have continued this monomaniacal passion until he died, years later, still thinking Eleanor was secretly in love with him but prevented by her family from showing it.

After Carden, in Michell’s book, come Sir Ian Stuart-Knill and his wife Lady Eve, a couple often to be met, around 1970, at the bus stop in Glastonbury: “very ordinary people, just poorer, simpler and more kind-hearted than most”. They seemed ordinary, anyway, “and yet their experience of life had evidently been quite different from anyone else’s”. Showing you a photo of the cat, Lady Eve would explain that it never climbed a tree in the normal way with its claws, “but hugged the trunk and swarmed up it like a sailor”. Sir Ian, meanwhile, had found his farmland unworkable; it was so full of buried suits of armour that it was impossible to get a plough through it. And all this was merely by the way, compared to their real passion for Arthurian genealogy and their first-hand psychic experience of King Arthur’s court.

And so the book continues, with flat earthers and hollow earthers, Tory reactionary Charles Sibthorpe, and conspiracy theorist Nesta Webster. There is the 18th-century judge Lord Monboddoo, who believed orang-utans were essentially human but for their lack of education (and that midwives removed human babies’ tails at birth), and the eugenicist Francis Galton. There are British Israelites who believe that Edinburgh was the biblical Jerusalem, UFO enthusiasts, and a couple who followed – and triumphantly survived – the Sixties consciousness-expanding fad for self-trepanation, or drilling a hole in your head.

Michell’s tone is warm but drily reasonable throughout. His discussion of Shakespeare authorship, and the claims for Francis Bacon as the real writer of the plays, soon shelves into the deeper waters of Shakespearean cipher decoders and treasure hunters: men like Dr Orville Owen, who caused excavations at Chepstow from 1909 to 1924. Owen was spurred on by an anonymous

letter, informing him that the second line of Ben Jonson's caption to Shakespeare's engraved portrait ("This figure that thou here seest put / It was for gentle Shakespeare cut") could be anagrammed to read "Seek, sir, a true angle at Chepstow – F."

"In the tradition of mystical treasure-hunters Owen was receptive to clues of that sort," says Michell, "and he took it for granted that Bacon had inserted the anagram in a line of someone else's verse as a clue to the whereabouts of his boxes." But, he points out, the anagrammatic message could just as well have been "Seek a sure triangle at Chepstow" or "Seek for a castle; swag put in there" or "Stalk treasure, Owen – cheap gifts", or for that matter "Forget it! Shakespeare cult wanes".

And that is a clue to an understated, underlying subject of the book, about the way people put together and make sense of reality. It was a subject in which Michell had a strong personal interest and, as if to put his signature on it, the book begins with a relative in the shape of Woodcock Carden (Michell was John Frederick Carden Michell) and ends with Michell's first subject of UFOs.

Michell's own thinking was peculiar and eccentric at times. He condemned Salman Rushdie, championed the innocence of Michael X (the would-be Black Power leader and murderer, whom he had known in Notting Hill), and published a handy collection of illuminating quotations from a popular German statesman of the 1930s, *The Hip Pocket Hitler*. This was an implicit response to the widespread naïve enthusiasm for Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*, and it was also announced at the time to be a work akin to *The Wit and Wisdom of the Duke of Edinburgh*. It was a mixture of the reasonable (on vegetarianism: "If I offer a child the choice between a piece of meat and a pear he'll immediately take the pear") and the more idiosyncratic: "A toad is but a degenerate frog", for example, and "There is no such thing as water. It is merely melted ice".

HARMONIES

Michell's thinking was further revealed in *Euphonics: A Poet's Dictionary of Sounds*. Like *Eccentric Lives*, this is another deceptively simple book with more at stake than first meets the eye. It is about the natural fittingness of sounds to meanings: "The bullying, bombastic tendency of the sound B... the power of O to overawe... of N to negate", and so on. A prose explanation of each letter sound is accompanied by some verse to exemplify the point, so section 'L. Lingering by a limpid lagoon' explains "The L sound expresses light and clarity; its corresponding motion is of languidly gliding liquid, as in a placid, limpid lagoon," before giving way to verse: "Languid lovers

lie in Lethe's valley / Lethargic, lotus-like, they laze and dally.' B, on the other hand, "is predominant in the names, both proper and vulgar, given to the bipartite bulges of the body: bust, bosom, breasts, boobs, bubs, bum, buttocks, butt, base, beam, bottom, backside", along with balloons and buffoons.

Underlying all this was a Platonic belief in the natural rightness of words and meanings, as in Plato's *Cratylus*, and even the dream of a lost primordial language where words and things correspond perfectly (very different to the current linguistic orthodoxy, where the relationship between 'signifier and signified' is said to be arbitrary). This belief in the harmonious rightness of things led Michell into some strange regions, with the

notion, for example, that not only do trees or rocks often look like faces or people, but that they might look more like the artistic styles and people of their regions. Rocks in China, for example, might look more like Chinese people. Antonin Artaud experienced something like this in Mexico, before returning to an asylum in France.

Michell's Platonism was inseparable from a belief in ideal forms, with our daily world only a pale copy of what it was and could be, and in lost Golden Ages, whether in prehistory or Merrie England. Politically he called himself a Radical Traditionalist, an odd mix of cosmically far-out and conservative. Some aspects of the modern world appalled him, but he tried to see the best in it: in the words of his son Jason Goodwin, "Contemporary art, for instance, was a racket, and he considered most modern artists to be conmen – but as conmen they were consummate artists."

Chosen precursors in the radical traditionalist tendency included William Cobbett, author of *Rural Rides*, who felt a creeping badness everywhere threatening England's green and pleasant land. In Michell's account, Cobbett saw Merrie England turning into a slum, but he couldn't put his finger on who or what was responsible. "Was it bankers, Jews, Quakers, Scotsmen, greedy landlords or something more abstract – capitalism, imperialism, materialism, modernism, Methodism or the habit of tea-drinking? Each of these in turn he looked upon as the main enemy, but none of them quite fitted the bill, so he lumped the opposition into one conglomerate and referred to it simply as the Thing."

If there was the Thing there were also 'Good Things', like the list he wrote in 1966 for his friend Candida Lycett Green. This included "huge, sad people with ginger moustaches in saloon bars; Wing Commanders with their own beer mugs;

people who say 'Hello John, how's John?'; Salvation Army bands at Oxford; Accrington Stanley football team's laundress, Mrs Reg Gutteridge, packing up the shirts for the last time" (Accrington Stanley had just been disbanded, happily to be revived again in 1968). Humane, slightly melancholy, slightly sentimental, it has the period Englishness of the Kinks' 'Village Green Preservation Society', Vivian Stanshall's 'Sir Henry at Rawlinson End', and Roy Harper's 'When An Old Cricketer Leaves the Crease'.

CASUALTIES

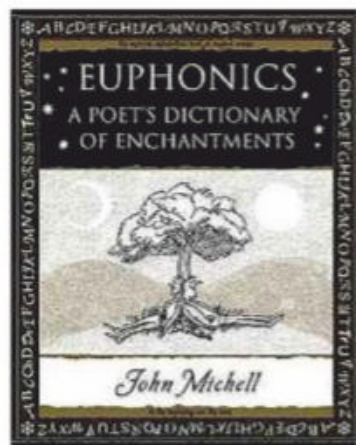
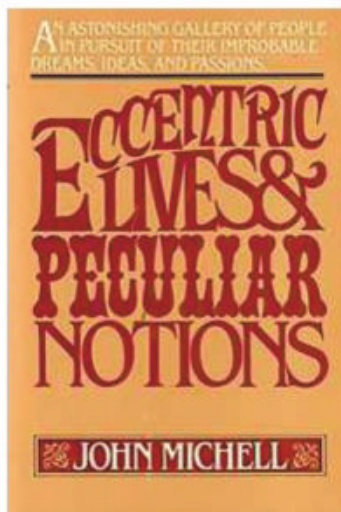
Michell's thinking continued to be drug-enhanced, and his early discovery of LSD gave way to a lifelong taste for cannabis; he said he found it inspiring, and useful for making intuitive leaps and odd connections. His *Telegraph* obituary mentioned his steady smoking of hand-rolled cigarettes, "some of which even contained tobacco".

Not all Michell's contemporaries grooved so happily on the drugs and lunacy of the era: he made his first trip to Glastonbury in the company of Harry Fainlight, one of the best minds of a generation destroyed by madness, who ended up like the Syd Barrett of British poetry. The New Age continues to be strewn with casualties. A couple of generations on, I wonder how many of the bongo rhapsodists and itinerant didgeridoo players so magnetically drawn to Britain's sacred stones, tors and henges might once have shared my enthusiasm for Michell's books, back in the days when they still had bookshelves.

I caught up with some of Michell's earlier work – out of around 50 books – backwards, from *Eccentric Lives*. There are real insights: for example, into the fact that subjective UFO visions seem to accompany transformative, epoch-changing cultural moments – moments that seem to exemplify the Sixties dictum, adapted from Plato, "When the mode of the music changes, the walls of the city shake".

But the more I read, the more my eyebrows drifted upwards. There were ancient Druids airborne in flying machines made of rock, utilising a lost Atlantean knowledge of the Earth's natural magnetism (possibly the same one that levitated the stones of Stonehenge). Along with this came the memorable and undeniably charming information that King Bladud of Bath, the father of King Lear, was killed in 852 BC when his airship crashed on Ludgate Hill, roughly where St Paul's is now.

I found it hard to understand some of Michell's central ideas, never mind agree with them, whether it was 12-tribe nations, the real nature of the temple at Jerusalem, or squaring the circle with the Earth and Moon. I wasn't entirely convinced by his anti-Darwinism either, or the mysterious nature of crop circles, and the more



THE BALLAD OF GENEROUS JOHN - A FRAGMENT

Lo! Where is John? Where could he be gone?
Have you seen him in Powis Square?
Is it true what they say – has he passed
away?
Surely he must be somewhere

Could he truly be dead? Not hiding instead?
Has the fox gone to ground in his den?
Can it really be so that he's laid below?
Perhaps he is risen again?

Is he off seeking pleasure in the marvel of
measure
And the angles of England's towns?
Is he jotting still in Notting Hill?
Does he ramble the Marlborough Downs?

Does he not wander the hills over yonder?
Does he ponder no longer their leys?
Does he sit 'neath the Moon by Bonnie Doon
Perusing her banks and her brays?

Alas, 'tis thus: John is taken from us
Who would have thought it could be?
He passed away on Saint George's Day
(But only by GMT)

In the shore of a Dorsetshire churchyard
In a hamlet half-hidden from view
John the brave lies deep in his grave
'Neath the shade of an ancient yew

He suffered not long; though his mind was
strong
His body was weary and ravaged
Cancer apart, he was killed by his heart
Which was far too big to be managed

The generous John, his salon is gone
His seat in the pub left unsat
His boots by the door will be muddied no
more
They mourn with his coat and his hat.

Bow every head, the Magus is dead,
The bard is departed from life
The shaman of shapes and measuring tapes
Is discharged from duty and strife

Beat on your chests; ignite cigarettes
Dash your cups to the floor
Raise ye a roar from Glastonbury's Tor
For the wizard is whizzing no more

Let banners be raised, let beacons be blazed
His passing proclaimed by the fire
May the dread metrickation, the scourge of
our nation
Be burned on his funeral pyre

Raise ye the bones of the Avebury stones
In the dew of a May Day morn
In the fields and farms of Alton Barnes
Stamp out his memory in corn

For the Golden Chain is broken again
Oh Albion's sons and daughters
Fear not my friends, it will some day mend
The wizard in his wisdom has taught us

Remember John – remember him long
For his limitless mental capacity
A man of letters, of more and better
A man of resource and sagacity

In the Sixties his UFOs and ley-lines and who
knows
What things that no others had thought of
Brought great renown; he went on to found
The Glastonbury festival (sort of)

John was bright and frighteningly erudite
For his learning he made no apology
He found language a breeze, pronouncing
with ease
Long words like phenomenology

He did his best to resurrect
The study of ancient metrology
Reading Plato anew; the gematria too
Euphonics and numerology

John roamed the land exploring first-hand
The geometry of Britain's geography
With a knapsack, a map and a cap and a
mac
And a penchant for ancient cartography

He suffered fools gladly no matter how badly
Or madly they'd state their case
To tales of visitation by pixies or aliens
He always would listen straight-faced

John never grew weary of crackpot theory
Ever kindly and patiently listening
Without rile or rancour he always would
answer:
"Oh really? How terribly interesting"

On the measure and merit of traditions
numeric
He wrote with precision and vision
He loved tacheometry, Euclidean geometry
And sexagesimal division

Division by sixty was used throughout history
For measuring angles and lines
From Sumerian maths to Cartesian graphs
And for the division of time

John believed it was right to apportion one's
life
In a sexagesimal way:
Sixty seconds each minute, sixty minutes
each hour
And sixty spliffs in each day

Oh where is John? Where could he be gone?
Now he is mortal no more
He has travelled far from us, he has crossed
Oceanus
To Elysium's shining shore

He walks with those who have thrice kept
their oaths
The great and the good and the wise
With those ones with the cleanest and purest
of souls
He sits 'neath Elysian skies

No more does he toil in this mortal coil
At last his soul is set free
No more does he sleep; he is drinking deep
From the river of memory

John wanders a world of perpetual wonder
A relief to him, no doubt
There's an endless store of listeners galore
Who know what he's talking about

Magi and mystics, sages and seers
Saddhus and saints by the score
Philosophers, prophets, cynics and sophists
Poets aplenty and more

There's the entire Hindu pantheon
With their top-knots and turbans and beards
There are Buddhists and Taoists and John
Cowper Powys
(Though everyone thinks that he's weird)

There's even a pub – the literary club
Where John is inclined to wander
Existentially French, it serves only Absinthe
Which maketh the heart grow fonder

There John idles the day with Iamblichus,
With Plotinus, Proclus and Cato
He exchanges views with Yeats and Ted
Hughes
And sometimes plays ping-pong with Plato

John shares a bottle with Aristotle
Debating the nature of logic
He has mushroom dinners with Terence
McKenna
And delights in the hypnagogic

If John isn't enjoying the afterlife
It's not for want of trying
He's even been out on a drinking binge
With Lord Byron and Flann O'Brien

Like so many others, John strove to discover
Who the writer known as Shakespeare could
be
Now doubt is dissolved; the mystery is solved
For he knows the man personally

The gregarious Greeks throw great parties
Smashing plates as they sing and they laugh
They're all great fun except for just one:
Archimedes, who won't leave his bath

Thomas Taylor's a chap who will cheerfully
check
John's Latin or Greek translation
Kepler and Ptolemy advise on astronomy
And the limits of lunar mensuration

John eats angel cake with William Blake
Swapping technical tips on lithography
He finds it quite hard though, explaining to
Strabo
How satellites are used in geography

You can smoke all you like in heaven
What's the harm, if you're already dead?
Fags are free – they grow on trees
You can even smoke safely in bed

The famous fields of Elysium
Are verdant and fertile and fair
And though not many people know it
The finest marijuana grows there

In those fields, to the deep and delicious
delight
Of any discerning reefer-seeker
Grows every strain of Mary Jane:
Cannabis, both Sativa and Indica

The finest plants from around the world
Full-budded and bursting with health
Enough pollen for Nepalese Temple Balls
But you'd have to make them yourself

Field after field, of fabulous weed
Of a quality money can't buy
John occasionally stops to inspect the crop
If he happens to be passing nearby

Although the stuff is quite strong enough
Should John wish to get higher, he can
By having a toke of the 'little smoke'
With Carlos Castaneda and Don Juan

John savours the mysteries with the sages
of history
Philosophers, thinkers and poets
He drinks with De Quincy and Coleridge and
Keats
(But he doesn't get on with the Stoics)

Samuel Palmer and Turner both are there
And the Shelleys – dear Mary and Bysshe
But no one can fathom why heaven would
have 'em:
They're born-again atheists!

Philosophy's fine, but not all the time
If he feels he's exceeded his quota
John can chat to the workmen, conversing
with Charon
On the workings of outboard motors

John's perfectly happy in heaven
Though he does miss his mortal friends
But maybe with luck, if they read the right
books
They'll one day join him again

He fears it was frightfully impolite
To suddenly leave, in a coffin
He'd like to write, just to say he's alright
But the price of the postage is shocking

Though John is dead, may his books still be
read
May his words live on forever
May they ne'er be dimmed, may he stay in
print
And be remaindered never

Remember John, remember him long
Mark you remember him well
Let's raise a toast to our absent host
The late, great John Michell

Steve Marshall

This poem was read at a memorial for John
Michell on 11 June 2009 at the Glastonbury
Assembly Rooms.

mathematical stuff didn't really speak to me. And yet there is still something enormously engaging and life-enhancing about his writing, which means very different things to different people. For *Private Eye* editor Richard Ingrams, he was "a welcome note of sanity and wisdom" in an "increasingly crazy world", while in America, for better or worse, he has been taken up by the Far Right. For Candida Lycett Green, "he made me realise it was arrogant not to believe in almost everything"; and the late Christopher Gibbs, Sixties character, cool antiquarian, and advisor to the National Trust, says "Heed the prophet and discover what makes Albion hum".

KINDNESSES

How did I meet the prophet? Years ago, barely out of short trousers, I had a belated enthusiasm for the British underground press. Along with back numbers of *Oz* and the *International Times*, I found a more arcane late emanation of this current called *The Fanatic*, which had different self-publishing editors for each issue. Issue 1, 'the cosmological issue from Bath' (boasting an 'impolite interview' with AJ Ayer) was edited by someone called John Michell, who lived at Synchronicity Studios, 11 Miles Buildings, Bath. Since I was visiting Bath, I knocked on the door. It was opened by a man who had a slight air of Doctor Who (in his Jon Pertwee incarnation) about him. A copy of *The Fanatic*? But of course! Sadly, however, I only had a five-pound note, and Mr Michell had no change. I beetled off to buy a Mars Bar, little knowing that my brush with greatness was all but over.

When I eventually returned, the door was opened by a young woman. I explained I wanted a copy *The Fanatic* and she returned with one, friendliness and helpfulness itself. Never finding girls easy to talk to, I thanked her profusely, while realising she had given me the wrong issue – but somehow the moment to mention this had passed. I had, in fact, deprived Michell of his own copy of a different number.

I had no idea whom I'd met, or the pleasure his writing would bring me in years to come. Like Fort, Michell can convince you there are 'more things in heaven and earth'. More than that, as he wrote in *Simulacra* – a book about all those trees and rocks that look like faces, and what-have-you – he understands that reality "will obligingly reflect back to the theorist any ideas projected on to it".



ABOVE: "A man who had a slight air of Doctor Who (in his Jon Pertwee incarnation) about him".

The benevolence that shines through his own writing is like an unusually pleasant relative of paranoia, paranoia's beautiful sister, finding and projecting harmonious patterns in and on the world.

Michell had a characteristic experience on a steam railway in Devon, run by a steam preservation society. "Everything was normal, in an old-fashioned way: cardboard tickets, a waiting room with tea... Yet on this private railway my fellow passengers were ecstatic. They laughed, exclaimed, gazed rapturously out of the window, behaving quite differently from the normal run of BR 'customers'. At first I wondered if they had spiked the tea, but then I saw the influence of a dream, dreamt by the line's proprietors and gratefully accepted by the good folk who paid money for their trip." The moral of the story, says Michell, is that you experience life with the intensity that you bring to it, and it is even possible to enjoy

"the exquisite pleasures of nostalgia, not for the imagined past but for something which is actually happening".

Taken in small doses, his writing is a recreational drug in itself. And as for the wackier stuff, the stuff we might not believe, we could do worse than remember Michell's own obituary for Brinsley Le Poer Trench, Lord Clancarty, the man who instigated the notorious House of Lords UFO debate. Trench believed that aliens lived inside our hollow Earth, with tunnels coming out in Tibet and larger holes at the North and South Poles. "I haven't been down there myself," he admitted, "but from what I gather they are very advanced." Trench was a gift for his *Daily Telegraph* obituarist. He had once produced a photograph showing a circular blob at the North Pole, which he said was the entrance to an alien tunnel: "He remained adamant even when it was pointed out to him that he was looking at part of the camera."

Michell remembered Trench with a gentler and more respectful obituary in *FT*. "Friends from all periods tell of his great kindness," he wrote, "and those who laughed at his beliefs were often disarmed by the simple courtesy with which he defended them."

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BREXIT BABYLON

As the reputed Brexit Day of 29 March rapidly approaches, **SD TUCKER** decodes some of the wilder EU-based conspiracy theories echoing around Brussels's hidden corridors of power.

This article is being penned under the possibly naïve theory that, on 29 March, Britain will be leaving the European Union – although, given current political hijinks, maybe not. Such impenetrable ambiguities constitute the very nature of today's Brussels statecraft, and were presciently foreseen by the former President of the European Commission Jacques Delors in a speech given in Luxembourg in 1985 in which he warned that if the Europhile Holy Grail of ever-closer union was handled ineptly, the European project itself could rapidly come to resemble that classic forteen icon, the UFO: "We must face the fact that in 30 or 40 years' time [i.e. now] Europe will constitute a UPO – a sort of Unidentified Political Object – unless we weld it into an entity enabling each of our countries to benefit from the European dimension and to prosper internally as well as hold its own externally."¹ And what is a UFO? Is it an alien craft, a hoax or merely a bizarre sociological phenomenon? And what is the EU? Is it a true democracy, a disguised dictatorship, or some hitherto-uncategorised third thing somewhere inbetween? The only certainty is that if the political tensions accurately anticipated by Monsieur Delors are not one day resolved, then the UPO itself could easily crash; with Brexit, perhaps the EU has just faced its very own Roswell Incident.

Or was it just a weather-balloon? Move on, nothing to see here, the sinister cover-up goes on as usual. That would be the opinion of Mario Borghezio, a conspiracy-mad MEP for Italy's right wing Eurosceptic 'Northern League' party. Borghezio is the type often described as being "no stranger to controversy", which is simply a polite media euphemism for "he's always doing weird things", whether that be setting fire to the property of homeless persons sleeping beneath a bridge, praising Serbian war criminal Ratko Mladic as "a patriot", or claiming that giving speeches basically causes him to orgasm in public. One particularly trouser-trembling talk of Borghezio's occurred in July 2010, when he presented a written declaration signed by 23 of his fellow MEPs (from a possible total of 736) demanding that all 27 EU member-states end "the systematic covering-up of information on the subject" and declassify any documents they may hold relating to UFOs immediately, while at the same time setting up a pan-European institute to



LEFT: Mario Borghezio, the Northern League's famously controversial and conspiracy-mad MEP.

HE CONSIDERS THE EU JUST A FRONT FOR THE BILDERBERGERS

investigate the phenomenon on the grounds that it could have "major scientific and technological spin-offs", a rare instance of a Eurosceptic calling for more, not less, taxpayers' cash to be wasted on unnecessary projects.

Actually, most of the true Euroscepticism came during a press conference organised by Borghezio the previous month, and emanated from the mouth of his friend Daniel Estulin, a part-Spanish 'independent scholar' and author of such books as *Shadow Masters* and *The Octopus Deception*. Estulin called the Belgian then-President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy "an unloved, short, evil little man [who] has gnawed his way into the bowels of power" – an even more damning assessment than former UKIP chief Nigel Farage's famous description of the fellow as hailing from a made-up country and possessing both the

charisma of a damp rag and the demeanour of a low-grade bank-clerk. Estulin's big problem with Van Rompuy was not his dullness, nor even the fact he was Belgian, but that he was a member of the Bilderberg Group, that ominous cabal of grey men in grey suits who supposedly control our world from behind the scenes. Borghezio hates the Bilderbergers too, and considers the EU to be nothing but a front for them, speculating in 2009 that all candidates then up for the key role of EU President, including Van Rompuy, were known Illuminati and thus "simply the candidates of these occult groups that meet behind closed doors to decide matters over the heads of the people." In June 2011 Mario attempted to gatecrash the annual Bilderberg meeting in the Swiss resort of St Moritz, causing a minor diplomatic incident and (so he says) gaining a bloody nose from security guards for his troubles. He had shown them his Brussels ID Card expecting to be waved through as a fellow plotter, but evidently not *all* MEPs were allowed to follow Van Rompuy's lead in burrowing tongue-first into the bum-cheeks of power.

Estulin's address was held under the auspices of the EFD grouping of Eurosceptic MEPs, and so due to be attended by various UKIP big-wigs, although come the actual day they suddenly declared themselves "unavailable or unwell" and stayed away. The speech began with misleading restraint. Bilderberg "isn't a secret society" Estulin said (it actually has its own website), neither was it "an evil, all-seeing eye", simply an exclusive club facilitating the "meeting of people who represent a certain ideology", that of liberal, left-leaning economic globalism. "There isn't a conspiracy," he said, and anyone who argued otherwise was engaging in "infantile fantasies". Unfortunately, Estulin then contradicted himself by laying out an infantile fantasy of his own. He revealed that the Bilderbergers aimed to secretly transform human society into a globe-spanning "ONE WORLD COMPANY LIMITED" with themselves as unacknowledged CEOs of "gigantic [business] cartels", thereby becoming an "ARISTOCRACY OF PURPOSE" controlling every aspect of life for "THE GREAT UNWASHED AS THEY CALL

US". The speech was in essence an anti-globalisation message, leading Estulin to laud the EFD's Eurosceptic MEPs as "patriots" who were at last willing to stand up to their Bilderberg masters. UKIP and the League must act fast, though, as the next Bilderberg plot was "destroying the world economy on purpose" on the grounds that a new "GREAT DEPRESSION = TRANSFER OF WEALTH" from poor to rich through banks recalling their debts. Unable to pay as global currencies tanked, debtors would have their other assets seized instead – even if those debtors were entire nations. Once, national debtors like the Greeks could simply have devalued the drachma to stimulate growth and pay off their dues. Now, trapped in the Euro, they were forced to do Brussels' bidding and put themselves in hock to the Bilderbanks forever. It was obvious the Greeks would never be able to pay off their debts, and none of the Eurocrats in charge of demanding they did so thought otherwise, "not even [José Manuel] Barroso, who with all due respect to him is intellectually challenged".

There was only one solution, urged Estulin: "Let's get rid of the bureaucracy in Brussels. Let's fire them all. They are bums. They are useless. These people have never done anything useful in their lives. Get rid of Barroso. He failed History in high school. Get rid of the 'wet rag' Van Rompuy, not because he is useless but because he is evil and very dangerous ... People such as Barroso, Van Rompuy ... [and] the managing director of the IMF can hardly be considered leaders. In fact, they can hardly be considered humans." Sadly, immediately prior to delivering this final diatribe, Estulin was gagged by a press officer and told to skip over this bit, thus showing how far the tentacles of the Bilderberg shadow-octopus really reached. When demanding Europe's governments release their UFO files, Mario Borghesio said he was only asking them to abide by their "duty" to do so under the EU "principle of transparency" – but surely such innately clandestine bodies *have* no such principles? ²

ET PHONE EU

Maybe the Eurocrats really *aren't* human, or are at least slaves to non-human forces. This was implied by comments made by the current President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker in the aftermath of the Brexit vote of June 2016 (see FT346:24), when he told an emergency meeting of MEPs the following: "It should be known that those who observe us from afar are very worried. I met and heard and listened to several of the leaders from other



ABOVE: Is the annual Bilderberg meeting the visible face of a global conspiracy to create a "one world company"? BELOW: Daniel Estulin thinks so, while Michael Salla points the finger at the Nazi lizard men from outer space.

planets who are very concerned because they question the path the European Union will [now] engage on. And so, a soothing is needed for both the Europeans and those who observe us from ... farther away."

Juncker's tongue had slipped, saying the words "leaders from other planets" instead of "other planetary leaders" in places like Asia; possibly he had imbibed too much claret that day. So, the official transcript was speedily altered to read that Juncker had "saw and heard and listened to several [global] executives", not aliens: the Bilderbergers, perchance?

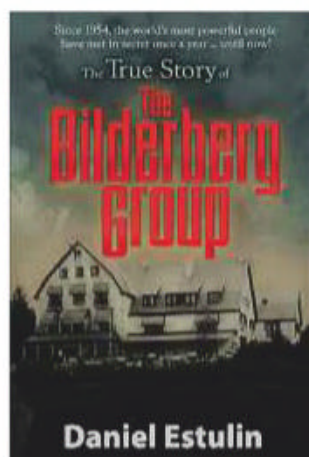
This was quickly noticed by online disc-heads like Dr Michael E Salla, PhD, the proud developer of a new academic field of political science called 'Exopolitics', which deals with the diplomatic relations he alleges are continually taking place between humans and ETs behind the scenes, as laid out in books like *Exopolitics: Political Implications of the Extraterrestrial Presence* and his practical guide *Galactic Diplomacy: Getting to 'Yes' with ET*. Salla decoded the corrected transcript as being "clearly an official attempt to cover up Juncker's admission" of being in cahoots with aliens, noting that in this same speech Juncker made several references to himself being only "a human being and not a robot or machine", thus implying that "some in his intended audience are not human". Unlike

alien Cybermen, Juncker was mere fallible flesh and blood, so had failed in his allotted task to get Britain to vote Remain – the puny human was trying to explain himself to his malign metallic masters, maybe. But why would ET robots care about Brexit? Salla presented two possible scenarios, one benign, the other disturbing in so many ways.

The positive spin was that, just like in *Star Trek*, alien races all belonged to a Galactic Federation in which they were represented on a planet-by-planet basis, not a country-by-country one. Therefore, if Earth ever wished to sign up for complete harmonisation with this Space-EU, it must first establish a one-world government in line with this non-negotiable regulatory model; in the interplanetary Schengen Zone nobody will require a Passport to Magonia. On the other hand, says Salla, possibly "the European Union is a façade for a Nazi Fourth Reich

which has secretly made alliances with a group of [evil lizard-men] extraterrestrials called 'Draconians'." According to Salla, prior to defeat in WWII top Nazi Martin Bormann had instructed German industrialists to siphon away cash and assets and prepare to set up a new 'Invisible Reich' to dominate post-war Europe via economic not military means, whilst various other Nazis found refuge in Antarctic bases

and sought diplomatic alliances with aliens. Shell companies were established by fascist businessmen, who then made moves towards establishing the EU's precursor organisation,





the European Coal and Steel Community, in 1951. The eventual resultant borderless free-trade area provided the ideal basis for using hidden Nazi money to enact hostile take-overs of major European companies like Volvo, whose CEOs would then lobby proto-Brussels politicians to arrange the world to the Hitler-lovers' liking. The end result was the current-day EU, which is in fact the Third Reich reborn, with an added alien agenda; the anticipated economic success of the Single Market would make other continents copy its model, thus allowing Nazi corporate lizards to gain control of the entire world by stealth.

Brexit threatened these plans: "The decision by Britain to end its participation... puts an end to the fiction that the EU genuinely represents the will of the European populace" rather than the will of unelected talking dinosaur-men. Being Nazis, the globalist EU top-brass, like 'Jack-Boot' Juncker, have bad memories of the last time Britain stood alone against a German-dominated 'United Europe', and so viewed the Leave vote as a possible prelude to Blighty "leading the way in confronting a resurgent Nazi Reich as a global threat". To Salla, "it does not appear coincidental" that the Brexit vote took place "at roughly the same time as a [secret] space-war is reportedly being waged against the Fourth Reich and its [lizard] allies, in Antarctica and Deep Space" by the Forces of Freedom. Diplomacy is merely war by other means, so Brexit itself may thus be the contemporary political equivalent of the Battle of Britain. But with the less-than Churchillian Theresa May in charge, expect to see the alien swastika flying over Downing Street any day now. ³



**"A SPACE WAR
IS BEING WAGED
AGAINST THE
FOURTH REICH
AND ITS ALLIES"**

BE-LEAVERS IN CHRIST

Another man who saw dystopian sci-fi themes in Brussels politics was the Reverend Ian Paisley, the (ahem) extremely committed evangelical Northern Irish preacher and founding-figure of Theresa May's coalition governing-partners, the DUP. Like many Eurosceptics, Dr Paisley proved surprisingly happy to accept the EU shilling (or Euro) and sit as an MEP, and in 1999 reported back home on the opening of the new Louise Weiss Building in Strasbourg, to which futuristic steel-and-glass edifice MEPs are needlessly but regularly forced to decamp from Brussels to hold sessions as a sop to French vanity. Here, he provided his readers with the following description of the parliamentary chamber of this "massive Crystal Palace" itself:

"It is certainly a building of the space-age. The seats of its massive hemicycle are designed like the crew seats in the *Star Trek* space-machines." It's democracy, Jim, but not as we know it – but who was sitting at the helm of the Starship Frictionless Free-Enterprise? Not James T Kirk. There were then 679 seats in the chamber, explained Paisley, "but wait for it! While these seats are allocated to Members, one seat remains unallocated and unoccupied. *The number of that seat is 666.*" Paisley theorised that the chair in question had been left vacant on purpose: "Today... Scripture is being fulfilled before our very eyes. The Antichrist's seat [666] will be occupied. The world awaits his full and final development... The coming of the Lord draws near."

Thank God he didn't notice that the occupant of seat 679 at the time was listed as being simply 'Crowley'! Accessing the EU's current seating plan online, however, allows us to find that seat 666 is now taken – and so it is with great pleasure that *FT* is able to exclusively announce that the true Antichrist is not Aleister Crowley, MEP, but the deceptively mild-mannered-looking German politico Thomas Mann, of Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party. Millennialists, of course, often preach that the Antichrist will falsely claim to represent Christianity in some way... which is why, to Protestant Dr Paisley, the real Wickedest Man in the World was actually Catholic Pope John Paul II, whose 1988 address to the EU the bigoted loud-mouth had famously disrupted by wielding an insulting poster and yelling "I renounce you as the Antichrist!" at him until forcibly ejected from the debating chamber.

When Remainers advance the notion that a No-Deal Brexit will mean Apocalypse, perhaps they do not realise that for certain hard-line sectarians in Northern Ireland, this acts as a selling-point, not a warning; to those who believe in the Rapture and Final Judgement, Armageddon is only a short-cut to true believers like themselves being beamed up to sit at Jesus's right-hand side



TOP AND ABOVE: The Reverend Ian Paisley, who was impressed by the "massive hemicycle" of the EU's *Star Trek*-like Strasbourg "Crystal Palace", if not by John Paul II's (aka the Antichrist) 1988 address to the EU.

in that great Stormont Assembly in the sky. In the run-up to 2016's referendum, giant graffiti appeared on the side of a house in a Loyalist area of Belfast reading "VOTE LEAVE EU – REV, 18:4", a verse from the Book of Revelation which reads: "And I heard another voice from the heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Was this direct instruction from Jehovah to vote for Brexit? The 'her' Christians are being told to leave here is the biblical Babylon, widely seen by scholars as being a synonym for 'Rome', once chief persecutor of the faith under Emperors like Nero. But the closest thing to a modern-day Roman Empire is arguably the EU, one of whose key constitutional texts was even called the Treaty of Rome. Eschatologists across the world have run with this idea, with Texas's Rev Irvin Baxter, of Endtime Ministries, going so far as to identify Angela Merkel herself as the Whore of Babylon, whom Revelation says will appear at the End of Time riding a horrific, scarlet-coloured, multi-headed, multi-horned beast. This scarlet (read shameless) beast is the EU itself, with its multiple heads and horns being the individual member-states, which the dominant German Chancellor clearly has under her full control.⁴

EU-related symbols are there for all to misinterpret in their own way. A case in point is a poster released by the Council of Europe in 1992 bearing the slogan 'EUROPE: MANY TONGUES, ONE VOICE', which shows a number of cuboid block-people, representing the pleb-citizenry of the EU, wielding tools to aid in the construction of the Louise Weiss Building, which has been deliberately re-drawn so as to resemble the infamous Tower of Babel. To a videogamer, the poster might appear an uncanny prediction of the smash-hit make-your-own-giant-buildings-with-a-block-man game *Minecraft*, but to an eschatologist it could be taken as a coded admission that the EU wishes to undo the will of God by building the Jehovah-toppled Tower back up again, while simultaneously reversing the Lord's sundering of mankind's original *ur*-tongue into a babel of different languages (with the aid of taxpayer-funded EU in-house translation-services). Ordinary voters, meanwhile, are transformed by the Antichrist into abject blockheads, duped by Thomas Mann, MEP, into doing his evil bidding, while looming above them all in the sky are the yellow stars of the EU flag, which are really satanic inverted pentagrams. People really do argue this online.⁵

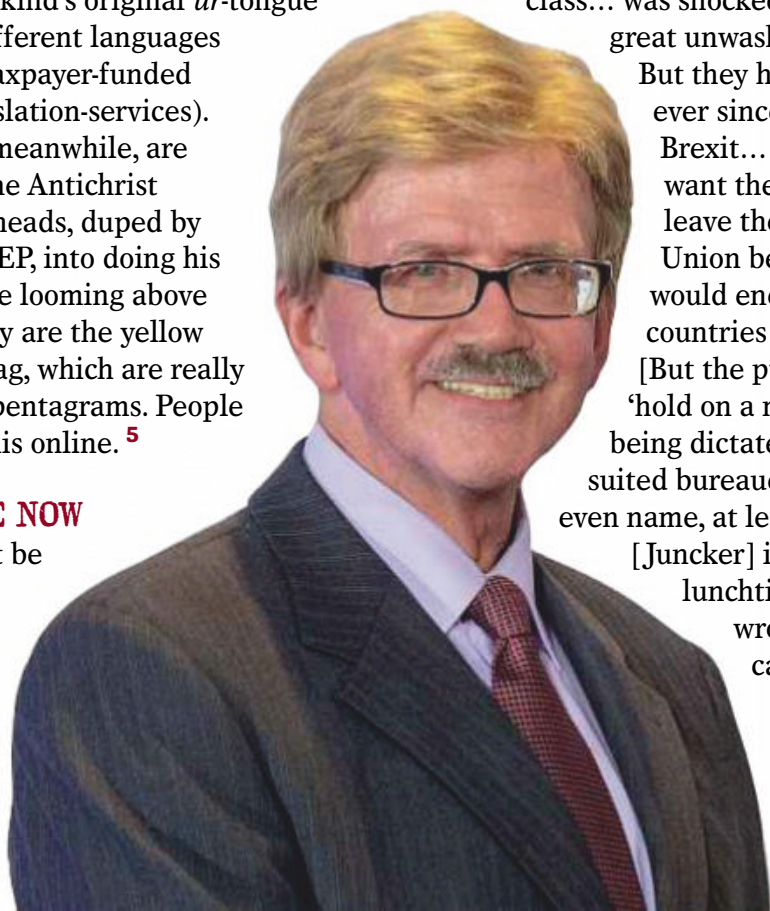
EUROPALYPSE NOW

But Brussels can't be under the control of Papists and Satanists,



humans and aliens, Far-Right Nazis and Bilderberg liberal capitalists simultaneously, can it? Presumably not, but my own theory is that the way Brussels actually works is so opaque and confusing that it can easily come across to the unqualified majority as being a massive open conspiracy against the very concept of democracy. This is just how modern technocratic government works, and many voters don't like it. If Brussels's inner workings appear so arcane and muddy, then the whole EU becomes a gigantic Rorschach Test onto which any old loon can project his own fantasies about who is really behind it all – including, in the case of Borghezio and Paisley, some actual MEPs.

Britain's most prominent conspiracy theorist, David Icke, has himself picked up on this theme, putting out a pro-Brexit podcast in December 2018 in which he proclaimed the following: "We have moved from what was [originally] sold [to duped voters] as a free-trade area and good for jobs to a centralised Super-State. They [Europe's politicians] had an absolute shock with the Referendum and the fact that people had had enough... The arrogant political class... was shocked because the great unwashed had spoken. But they have worked ever since to undermine Brexit... They do not want the UK to smoothly leave the European Union because that would encourage other countries to do the same. [But the public] will say 'hold on a minute, we are being dictated to by dark-suited bureaucrats we cannot even name, at least one of whom [Juncker] is pissed by lunchtime'." Is Icke far wrong here? He can't be, as even



ABOVE: The Tower of Babel rebuilt by the EU as the blockheaded citizenry look on in a 1992 Council of Europe poster. BELOW: The man in seat 666: the deceptively mild-mannered looking Thomas Mann MEP.

that fine organ the *Daily Express* reported his words online under the admiring headline 'Crikey, Icke[y] got it rightly!'.⁶ That is the dire state Europe's leaders have now brought us to – one in which, to some, David Icke is talking more sense than they are. If Brexit has indeed been delayed or destroyed by the time you read these words, then do our lizard-rulers think this is going to extinguish an ever-growing sense of alienation and suspicion about how modern-day Western pseudo-democracies really work – or will it simply fuel it?

NOTES

- https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2001/10/19/423d6913-b4e2-4395-9157-fe70b3ca8521/publishable_en.pdf
- <https://euobserver.com/political.30441>; www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/ufo/7875617/EU-call-for-X-Files-archive-of-UFO-sightings.html; www.businessinsider.com/mario-borghezio-bilderberg-2011-6?r=US&IR=T; www.infowars.com/italian-mp-denounces-bilderberg-influence-during-european-parliament-meeting/; www.rt.com/russia/castro-lashes-bilderberg-group/; www.neweurope.eu/article/europe-freedom-and-democracy-vs-bilderberg-group/; <https://publicintelligence.net/daniel-estulin-bilderberg-speech-at-eu-parliament-press-conference/>; www.thelocal.ch/20110610/310; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mario_Borghezio
- www.exopolitics.org/tag/european-commission/; www.exopolitics.org/brexit-britain-challenges-covert-fourth-reich-its-secret-space-program/
- www.economist.com/erasmus/2016/06/24/for-hard-line-protestants-leaving-europe-is-a-matter-of-eschatology; www.nytimes.com/1988/10/12/world/ulster-protestant-interrupts-pope-yelling-antichrist.html; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-36091022; <https://religioninpublic.wordpress.com/2016/07/19/does-brexit-mean-the-end-of-the-world-yes-and-not-in-a-good-way/>; www.omegatimes.com/2008/09/the-vacant-seat-number-666-in-the-european-parliament/; www.vice.com/en_au/article/mv57qx/the-wages-of-boredom-its-death; there is a substantial strand of Protestant evangelical thought which maintains that the Pope secretly controls the EU with the hidden aim of making all Europeans bow towards Rome, which draws strength from the genuine fact that many EU founding-fathers were highly committed Catholics, though there is no room to explore that topic here.
- A detailed study of eschatological EU symbolism appears in Dr Steve Knowles' article 'Brexit, Babylon and Prophecy: Semiotics of the End Times', online at <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/12/396/htm>
- www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1058980/Brexit-news-EU-latest-David-Icke-conspiracy-podcast-Theresa-May

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Witchcraft in the White House

Did Trump really call in the exorcists? **TED HARRISON** reports on one of the stranger claims made by America's religious right...

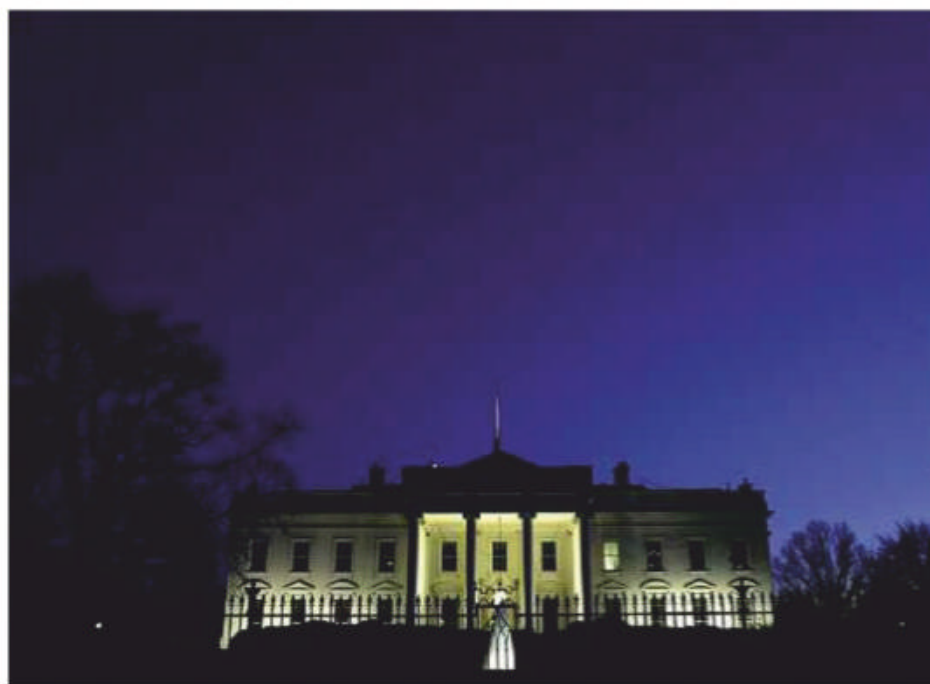
Before taking up residence, President Trump had the White House exorcised – at the insistence of his wife, Melania.

The claim was made by American evangelist Pastor Paul Begley last year on the online radio programme 'Weekend Vigilante'. According to Pastor Begley, the new First Lady demanded that the White House be spiritually cleansed and that pagan, demonic items and artefacts from the Obama and Clinton years be removed. She said that she would not step inside the American Presidents' official home until this was done. Melania, who is a Roman Catholic, was convinced that under both the Obamas and the Clintons the White House had become spiritually tainted.

Pastor Begley reported that the spiritual cleansing was performed, just as Melania requested: "They had people in there anointing it with oil and praying everywhere." The only thing left of any spiritual significance was a cross on the wall.

Quoting his 'unnamed sources' inside the White House, Pastor Begley said that the First Lady apparently insisted: "You've got to get all of that out of there and send in some preachers and priests – she wanted priests or anyone – to go in and cleanse the White House or she would not spend one night there."

The President did what she asked, said Begley. "There were people in there packing up every idol... it might sound like overdoing it, a little excessive, but you've got to take the seat of authority when you go into spiritual warfare. You start



ABOVE: The White House – spiritually cleansed and freed from demonic influence.

with the spiritual authority and then it goes on from there out. I think that that might have been where this whole thing began, in a mighty way of exorcising the demons."

Pastor Begley claimed that the Clintons had been influenced by voodoo. On their honeymoon in 1975, he said, they went to Haiti and visited a voodoo priest. "They decorated their homes with Haitian art. They flew back again and again. Hillary Clinton once said that theirs was a 'Haiti-obsessed family'." They have certainly been involved in development work in the country through the Clinton Foundation.

In his memoir, *My Life*, former President Bill Clinton gave a vivid account of witnessing voodoo in practice in a village near Port-au-Prince. "After several minutes of rhythmic dancing to pounding drums, the spirits arrived, seizing a woman and a man. The man proceeded to rub a burning torch all over his body and walk on hot coals without being burned. The woman, in a frenzy, screamed repeatedly, then grabbed a live chicken and bit its head off. Then the spirits left and those who had been possessed fell to the ground."

The trip to Haiti came at a pivotal time in Clinton's early

career. He was weighing up the options of running for election as Arkansas Attorney General. "By the time we got back from Haiti, I had determined to run."

Whether that admission amounts to a life-long obsession with voodoo that would ultimately taint the President's official residence, is a matter of opinion. If the story of the exorcism has any substance, it might be explained by Melania's Catholicism. It is a common and un-sinister practice in some Catholic traditions to ask a priest to bless a new home.

It was not only President Trump's election opponent, it is claimed, who was Satanically influenced. His predecessor in the White House, Barack Obama, was also said to have employed witchcraft for political ends.

In 2016, Rick Wiles, host of an American religious and right-wing radio show called TruNews, discussed "the possible occult connections" between Obama and the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. It was suggested that Scalia was murdered by President Obama as a human sacrifice to mark the pagan festival of Lupercalia.

Wiles explained that the Luciferian Devil-worshippers who control the Government are out

for blood, noting that Lupercalia is observed between 13 and 15 February. Scalia's body was discovered on the 13th. "There's always human sacrifice involved," Wiles said. "The 13th was the 44th day of 2016, Obama is the 44th President of the United States, so you have this numerology thing taking place."

It was not the first time the Obamas had been accused of witchcraft. In 2008, a blogger going by the name 'Flo Ellers' told a story of an evangelist who had gone to President Obama's father's home village and met his cousin Odinga. "She said the witches, warlocks and those involved in Satanism and the occult get up daily at 3am to release curses against [John] McCain and [Sarah] Palin so B Hussein Obama is elected."

Trump, however, despite his known faults, is sufficiently humble to know he needs God, says Pastor Begley, and the President regularly invites pastors to the White House to pray over him.

Meanwhile, one Alabama preacher clearly feels that Trump needs a bit of extra help, and has asked his congregation to pray for the President in his fight against witchcraft. Pastor John A Kilpatrick, who founded the Church of His Presence in Daphne, Alabama, said that witchcraft was trying to take over America. In a video of his sermon that has been viewed by 300,000 people on Facebook (according to *Newsweek*, 28 Aug 2018), Kilpatrick can be seen shouting and speaking in tongues as he prays for Trump. It is a spellbinding performance. "I'm coming to you as a prophet, as a man of God, and I'm telling you, it's time to pray for the President. God make him bold, make him strong! Preserve him, Holy Spirit! Keep him."

◆ **TED HARRISON** is a writer, artist and former BBC religious affairs correspondent. He is a regular contributor to FT.

Citizen Forteana

GORDON RUTTER invites FT readers to get involved with six experiments that might not change the world but are fun to do and could yield some interesting fortean data.

According to Google Dictionary, 'Citizen Science' is "the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists".

So why don't we as forteans get involved? It's time for Citizen Forteana! Of course, Rupert Sheldrake has carried out some work in this field (*Seven Experiments That Could Change the World*, Riverhead Books, 1994), but you might not have a pet that knows when you are coming home, nor might you be interested in amputating a limb to see if you're left with a phantom arm or leg. (Seriously, though, if you've lost a limb in an accident, by all means go down this route, otherwise please don't try this one at home!)

So, how does Citizen Forteana work? Simple. I have designed a range of experiments that can all be tried pretty much anywhere. Anyone who is interested can carry out these experiments and submit the results, online (through the website www.gordonrutter.com/citizen-forteana/ or via email at citizenforteana@gmail.com) or to me care of FT. The results will then be analysed and I'll report back on the results in a future issue. Simple!

So, what do I suggest we do? Well, there are six potential experiments, only two of which are likely to involve any financial outlay (£5-£10). You can do the ones that work for your



environment and report back on those; please don't feel you have to do them all. And if you do an experiment and it doesn't work, then please report back on that as well – negative results might not be sexy but they are just as important. So what are the experiments we are looking at?

EXPERIMENT ONE

This is a simple one that needs only two people – dowsing. Over the years, I have carried this out with hundreds of subjects (see Gordon Rutter, 'Strange Phenomena in the Classroom', FT336:57) and I'm always impressed by the better-than-chance results. Even the strictest adherents of dowsing don't claim it works for everyone, so first off there is a control. I use water, sweets or money (something the subject will have an interest in – please report which you use). Place the target on the ground and start a few feet away. Hold your dowsing rods – two coat hangers cut and straightened into L shapes work just fine – lightly in your hands, parallel to the ground. Think of the target object and walk towards it, all the while concentrating on your target. If the rods refuse to cross when you can see the target, try the next experiment instead. If they do cross – good. Now, go out of the room. While you are out of the room, your partner hides the target under one of two identical

Negative results might not be as sexy but are just as important

opaque containers (metal waste paper bins are good). You come back in and see which one the rods cross over while you are thinking of the target. Ignore your partner, who is keeping quiet. Have as many goes as you want and when you feel you have an answer say which of the two containers contains your

LEFT: Making your own rods and dowsing for sweets or money is easy enough. BELOW: Does orgonite make plants grow better? Time to find out...

target and then check. Record your result. Repeat as many times as you can – the more data we have the better – but do choose a number before you start; don't just stoop after a run of successes. I have had people with 100 per cent success on this over a run of (only) 10 trials. By guessing you would expect to be correct 50 per cent of the time – which means that 10 successes in a row is odds of 1 in 1,024.

EXPERIMENT TWO

This is a solo effort. I have a sealed cardboard box in my house. I am the only person who knows what is in it. Can you find out what the box contains by remote viewing? There is a picture of the box on the website to give you a target to focus on. Find a calm place without distractions and concentrate on what is in the box. Write down words that come to you. Draw pictures. State what it is. Whatever you like. Don't tell others what you got and report your result on the website.



PHOTOS: GORDON RUTTER



PHOTOS: GORDON RUTTER

ABOVE LEFT: Rupert Sheldrake famously investigated the 'the sense of being stared at', and you can too – although you'll need a friend to help with this experiment. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Zener cards appear to have fallen out of favour in parapsychology experiments these days, but they are readily and cheaply available and easy to use.

EXPERIMENT THREE

An old favourite: Zener cards. These are not much used in parapsychology experiments nowadays, but are still useful for us. Packs are available online from £5 upwards. There are five designs, and a 20 per cent chance of getting the right answer by guessing. One person looks at a card for five seconds, the other writes down what they feel it is, and once all the cards have been placed face down in a pile you check the results. Did you do better than 20 per cent?

EXPERIMENT FOUR

How about orgonite? What is it? Resin, metal shavings and quartz, which balance orgone energy and remove negative energy, or so it is claimed. One of the claims made for orgonite is that it makes plants grow better (see **FT249:24, 261:44-45**). Does it?

Plant two sets of plants – same number, same type – and keep them in identical conditions. Place orgonite next to one set but not next to the other. Keep a diary of how they grow. Best practice would include measurements, such as weight and length, but a photograph of the two sets at the end of the growing period, and an indication of which is which, will do. If we get meaningful results, we can extend the study and start to use double blind procedures from then on.

Cress seeds are a cheap and

quick way to get results and orgonite can be bought relatively cheaply on eBay and from other online retailers. Of all the experiments here, this is the most expensive – but shop around and orgonite can be found for a reasonable price.

EXPERIMENT FIVE

We stay with plants here, but this should be carried out as a separate investigation. (Remember, you should only change one variable at a time – as you were taught in your science classes.) This experiment compares talking to plants versus not talking. And we don't just mean a single sentence here, but talking to them on a daily basis. Numerous variations on the basic experiment are possible. How about talking to *both* sets of growing plants but saying nice things to one set and nasty things to the other? Is there a difference between talking to them live as opposed to playing them a recording? Ideally, you'd be saying the same things, so record what you say to one set of plants and play the recording to your other, identically set up group of plants. What about playing music to the plants – music versus, no music, or you could try a comparison of different genres. That's five basic plant experiments for the price of one! Before and after photographs (both plant sets in the same image) and/or measurements

would be needed, and obviously let us know what treatment each group got. Does jazz get them going? Do they rock out? Is there a 'Mozart Effect' for plants? Is it just the carbon dioxide in your breath?

EXPERIMENT SIX

This one just has to be included. Made famous by Rupert Sheldrake, it's an experiment that addresses something that most of us have experienced and something that can easily be tested: the sense of being stared at. You are walking along and get a prickly feeling at the back of the neck, a sense someone is looking at you – you turn around, and they are! Psychic ability or coincidence? If coincidence, you'd expect to be correct only half of the time. It may be that this happens to you all the time – but is this just classic confirmation bias, whereby you remember the times you were right and forget those other times when no one was looking at you? Well, this is a chance to find out. At its most basic you and a friend work in an area where the subject – the staree (I think I've just invented a word) cannot see what the investigator (the starrer) is doing. The starrer flips a coin and this governs whether they stare at the staree or not. After 10 seconds, record the state (staring or not) and whether the subject felt they were being stared at (don't

just say when they got it right); so you're recording condition, response and whether the subject was correct. In the report, indicate the relationship between the two individuals – do we get a different response when the pairs are relative strangers compared to a pair of long-term friends? How well does it work with siblings or identical twins? If you have a group of people, you can use multiple starers – if so how many were you using?

So there we have it. Six basic experiments, with some possible modifications and variations.

Now for this to work we need to get results – so please try them. Do one. Do them all. But most importantly, whatever you do, report back with your positive or negative results. Some of these experiments can be carried out in different ways, but if we all use the same method we can combine results; so stick to the protocols and where there is a choice report which method you used. The website is www.gordonrutter.com/citizen-fortean. We'll keep this going for six months from the UK publication of this issue, and then I'll collate the results and report back.

Good luck!

◆ **GORDON RUTTER** founded and still runs the Edinburgh Fortean Society. An FT regular, he is by day a biology teacher.

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

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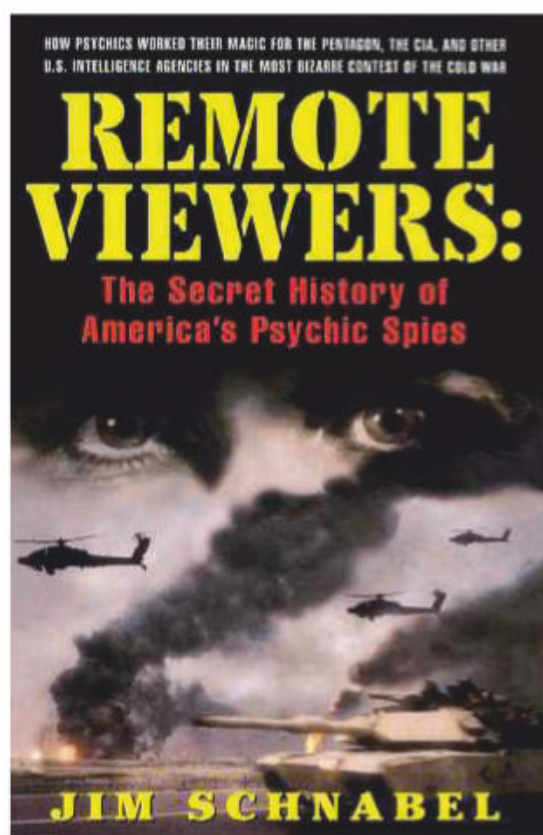
44. HE MEN WITH PSYCHIC BINOCULARS

There has been a ton of stuff written and published on the US military's fascination with extrasensory perception, notably its venture into 'remote viewing', a fancy name for clairvoyance and associated forms of ESP. The survey of the subject we here commend to your bookshelf is the original and best, as it says on the Kellogg's cornflakes and Jacob's cream crackers packets. And indeed it has a goodly portion of crackers-ness and flaky characters to keep you entertained as well as informed, while being written by an eminently sane author in an eminently sane style.

Jim Schnabel's *Remote Viewers* opens with an interesting disclaimer to reassure the sceptical reader, confirming that, following "the standard techniques of investigative journalism", he interviewed many participants at all levels of involvement, cross-checked sources, and gathered as much documentary evidence as possible. Individual sources are listed in endnotes. Some insisted on anonymity. "Were the subject of this book a different kind of classified government program," he says wryly, "it would not be necessary to say any of this." After that, it's pretty much straight into the fray.

Military remote viewing (RV) was run by the US Army, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Stanford Research Institute (SRI), and the CIA, at various times and in varying degrees. In the way of things, the project(s) went through various code names – Gondola Wish, Grill Flame, and others – ending as Stargate, which may sound both hubristic and pretentious. The CIA and SRI had been experimenting with RV since 1972; in about 1977, the Army joined in. The whole enterprise lasted until 1995, by which time it was but a shadow of its former self. Whoever was in charge, word of its existence soon spread throughout the world of US espionage, and 'clients' came with 'tasks' from all over the military establishment. The obvious appeal of RV was that, if it worked, it was an incredibly cheap way to confirm or refine intelligence from other sources.

A less obvious inspiration, but a powerful one, was the thought, not to say gibbering fear, that the Soviets were already doing the same thing and doing it better. Naturally, the Soviets were keen to foster that impression. One of their channels was Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder's *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (1970) which, stuffed



with wild tales and huge claims, was probably a masterpiece of carefully placed misdirection and disinformation put into the hands of two ladies only too willing to listen. US intelligence sources likewise picked up, or were fed, improbable tales of Soviet psi achievements, the more notable coming from "the toughest Siberian shamans, the best-trained Tibetan priests, the most powerful *chi gong* masters" whom the Russians had recruited. Ethnologists had long known of shamanic contests, for instance: "Holger Kalweit gives an example from the Washo Indians of North America... 'One form of their competition consists in seeing who can knock over the greatest number of poles, which are tightly rammed into the earth in a line, merely by pointing at them.'" Adds Schnabel drily: "Another form of competition, presumably, is the telling of tall tales to

wide-eyed ethnologists." Such powers were supposedly put to practical use by the KGB and Soviet military. Untrammelled by Western standards of ethics, these characters allegedly caused people to fall off buses, or slaughtered small furry animals at up to a mile distant. One medicine man "had an occasional problem with control. They sent him up against a rat in a cage and he ended up killing one of the researchers. And then there was the one about the fellow who was supposed to stop the heart of some poor human subject in the next room... The shaman or whoever he was wound up and sent his psi energies flying, and sure enough, the convict's heart stopped cold – but so did the shaman's." That one deserves to have made FT's 'Strange Deaths' column, or (better) that bastion of fearless investigative journalism, the *Weekly World News*.

The damage done by such tales was mostly psychological (the likely intention) and in response, the Americans' expenditure was gratifyingly minimal. But some of their results were intriguing. In a dry run, one RVer precisely identified the Hoover Tower, a 285ft (87m)-high building on the Stanford University campus (and named, incidentally, after US President Herbert Hoover, not the cross-dressing sadistic control freak who corrupted the FBI). Some operational results were positively detailed. Given a set of map co-ordinates on which to concentrate, two viewers made out an odd-shaped bit of kit, "an hourglass-shaped device" that they couldn't explain. One of them detected "a hell of an explosion", but he sensed it was not nuclear. All this, it's worth noting, was *retroactive* – the RVer were tasked with looking at something that had already happened: their relationship with time was somewhat fluid, not always helpfully or controllably. It turned out that the intelligence watchers had been expecting a Chinese air-launched nuclear airburst test, and it hadn't happened; and they wanted to know why. It seems that the bomb's parachute didn't open, and its high-explosive trigger didn't set off the nuclear reaction; while the "hourglass-shaped device" was a feature of nuclear weaponry that American experts recognised, but thought the commies hadn't yet worked

out how to make. As with other RV tasks, what the RVers ‘saw’ was confirmed by other sources. What’s not clear from Schnabel’s account is how they knew what date to go back to for viewing.

In the late 1970s, the National Security Council wanted to know what was going on inside a quarter-mile-long (400m) building that a satellite had spotted at the Severodvinsk naval shipyard in northern Russia. There, worming their way in psychically, in stages, the RVers found a massive submarine, with a flat aft deck, under construction. Asked how many missile tubes it carried, they ran into a common RV problem: letters, numbers, and counting broke viewers out of their ‘zone’, and images would dissolve. (Try reading a paper or a label in a dream, and you’ll probably get the same result.) But drawing the sub after a session revealed up to 20 missile tubes, set unusually at an angle from the hull. The RVers’ detailed descriptions were met with an almost clichéd response in naval intelligence and the NSC, one faction maintaining the psychics’ data was “sketchy or trivial, or unverifiable, or a lucky guess”, others saying in so many words that this was the greatest stuff since the demise of the ship’s biscuit. Four months after this last RV session, satellite pictures showed an enormous sub floating at the Severodvinsk dock. It was the first of six 48,000-tonne *Typhoon*-class ships, carrying 20 canted missile tubes, the biggest submarines ever built, just as described by the RVers. Score one to them.

Then there was the then-brand-new Soviet T72 main battle tank. The Americans obviously wanted to know all about it. “So, they did it the American way: they went out and bought one.” Whether they acquired it through the Romanians or the Poles, by way of a discreet arms dealer, is a moot point. Having done the deal, the Americans naturally wanted to be sure their contraband was safely on its way, and tasked the RVers to track it. They successfully described it where it was supposed to be (on a rail car), and in due course on a ship. Then the ship was seen apparently being hijacked, by whom is unclear. The RVer used something like telepathy to find out from the captain what was going on. All was well: the event was staged, “presumably to cover the tracks of the general who was selling the tank.” And a few weeks later, the T72 was duly delivered to the US Army’s Aberdeen Proving Grounds. (What the US Army may or may not have known, but we do now, was that the T72s delivered to the Warsaw Pact members were built to a lower spec than those going into service with the Red Army – probably because the latter wanted some advantage if the satellite countries decided to come after them instead of the NATO armies.)

Not everything was as clear-cut. The viewers’ monitors realised that they often couldn’t trust the RVers’ own



ABOVE: A Russian *Typhoon*-class submarine, as found successfully by the RVers.

“BOOKS BREAK
THE SHACKLES
OF TIME—PROOF
THAT HUMANS
CAN WORK
MAGIC.”
Carl Sagan

interpretations of what they were seeing. Details might be correct, but elucidations were often perverse. A “classic example” was interpreting a target (a Methodist church) as an airline ticket counter, with a gold cross on the wall assumed to be the company’s logo. Alphanumerics were elusive. The signals were usually weak amid the noise in any case, and RVers were prone to become ever more wayward the harder they were worked – sometimes heading for burn-out, as they were, for example, after round-the-clock sessions trying to figure out what was happening during the Iranian hostage crisis (November 1979 – January 1981).

Part of the problem was a lack of suitable talent. There just weren’t that many people in the military who could do the job. Had there been, besides, the higher echelons’ suspicion surrounding the use of psychics kept the budgets tight. As it was, some of the recruits turned out to have somewhat strange beliefs. Possibly the nuttiest of all those involved was Major-General Albert Stubblebine, famous for attempting to walk through walls and thinking it was a good idea to stare down goats (goats! might as well try to herd cats, but Schnabel is too discreet to dig too deeply here – and doesn’t mention goats once.) Ed Dames seems to have swallowed Richard Hoagland’s face-on-Mars-ancient-civilisation-on-Cydonia hokum, believed that the Loch Ness Monster was “merely a

dinosaur’s ghost”, and that “lost Atlantis was actually at the bottom of Lake Titicaca in Peru”. Numerous RVers were distracted from their official targets by noticing UFOs hovering nearby; but then many had a prior interest or belief in ET visitors, and with believers in charge of monitoring the RV sessions it wasn’t always possible to be certain they weren’t leading the viewers. Hal Puthoff, running the operation at SRI, deliberately sent his viewers after UFOs. Joe McMoneagle would find himself inside “the cramped, curved interior of an unearthly ship, filled with skinny, large-eyed humanoids” and later (on the basis of his RV sessions) suggested that Martians built the pyramids and that UFOs were “human-piloted craft from the future.” It’s hard not to see suspect cultural contamination, not objective observation or leadership, in all this.

Puthoff brought in Ingo Swann, who tried in a peculiarly, not to say spectacularly, dictatorial manner to impose some structure on the RV process itself; the viewers tried his system, found it too rigid, and reverted to their own, albeit often modified by Swann’s ideas. Uri Geller was auditioned, ran about the place like a maniac distracting everyone, and didn’t get asked back. As time went on, the RVers’ stars began to fade: one ended up using the Tarot pack and automatic writing at work. It may have been word of this kind of thing as much as shifts of personnel at the top, leaving sceptics in charge, that finally brought about the demise of the RV programme. It was, as the book’s blurb says, “the strangest chapter in the history of espionage”, made all the more intriguing by its apparent successes. And to repeat ourselves, Schnabel’s is the original and best version of its history.

Jim Schnabel, *Remote Viewers: The Secret History of America’s Psychic Spies*, Dell Publishing, 1997

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Examining “charismatic critters”

The natural history of American mountain lions (and their very cute kittens) in their native habitat is useful to determine whether there is any substance to the UK’s Alien Big Cats phenomenon

Mountain Lions of the Black Hills

History and Ecology

Jonathan A Jenks

Johns Hopkins University Press 2018

Hb, 144pp, illus, refs, ind, \$75.00, ISBN 9781421424422

Anomalous big cats (ABC) are a fortean mainstay. But in some cases, their identity remains as enigmatic now as it did when Fort considered mysterious appearances of out-of-place animals in *Lo!* And stories persist, including sightings of a puma-like ABC prowling in and around the Cambridgeshire village in which I live.

Merrily Harpur’s classic 2008 *Roaring Dorset! Encounters with Big Cats* notes that about 15% of UK sightings resemble pumas, also called mountain lions, panthers and cougars. Their Lamarckian name *Puma concolor* means ‘cat of one colour’: these magnificent creatures vary from a tawny brown to light cinnamon, with black on the backs of their ears and the tips of their tails.

Mountain lion kittens are almost irresistibly cute. Harpur notes that in the 1970s, you could buy a zoo-bred puma for about £20. The owners would have had their work cut out. Jenks remarks in his excellent new book that an adult male mountain lion can reach more than 8ft (2.4m) in length, weigh up to 78kg – about 12 stone – and live more than nine years in the wild.

It’s plausible that big cats that escaped or their owners released when the Dangerous Wild Animal Act came into force in 1976 account for some historical ABC sightings. Certainly, big cats escape: Harpur recounts that a pet puma kept in a shed in Hampshire escaped and then wandered around the village

until it was caught. So far as we know, all the escaped big cats were either recaptured or shot. But, of course, neither released animals nor escapees account for all the sightings.

So, understanding the natural history of, as Jenks puts it, this “charismatic critter” is essential to see if there’s any substance to the ABC phenomena. But aside from the fortean interest, *Mountain Lions of the Black Hills* distils decades of in-depth investigation into a compelling, accessible read that will appeal to anyone with even a passing interest in zoology and everyone who loves cats. If you don’t think mountain lions are charismatic critters now, you will by the time you finish this wonderful book.

Mountain lions are, for example, remarkably adaptable. Once their territory spread from Chile’s southern tip to the Yukon territory in northwest Canada. Jenks points out that this is one of the largest distributions of any terrestrial mammal. Christopher Columbus encountered mountain lions in Honduras and Nicaragua. Hunters and explorers soon recognised the puma’s predatory prowess. Theodore Roosevelt described the mountain lion as “a more skilful hunter than any human rival”.

The Black Hills National Forest covers some 1.2 million acres in South Dakota – that’s about 1,875 square miles – with countless crevices that give mountain lions plenty of opportunity to evade hunters and capture prey. The South Dakota authorities considered this magnificent beast a pest and in 1889 placed a bounty on the puma’s head. By the early 1900s, the mountain lion was considered eradicated from the state. But there were sporadic sightings, which, in

“You have to wonder why, Harpur notes, there’s never been a recorded [UK]ABC roadkill”

1978, led to the mountain lion becoming a protected species in South Dakota.

Even people in South Dakota, who are presumably relatively familiar with the puma, can confuse bobcats and domestic cats with mountain lions. “Issues of depth perception probably account for such errors. The farther away an animal is from the viewer, the larger it seems to be,” Jenks comments. I suspect that “issues of depth perception” account for most ABC sightings in the UK, though, again, it’s not the whole story.

Jenks also make some telling comments about their tracks. He notes, for example, “numerous instances” where people mistook a print of a dog or coyote for that of a mountain lion. We expect them to leave a large track. But most puma dispersing to find new territories weigh about six stone and leave relatively small tracks.

Cryptozoologists need to consider population density to see if there could be any substance to the ABC phenomena. Jenks reports that in 1996, the Black Hills were home to an estimated 15 mountain lions. This rose, assuming reasonable mortality, to more than 200, which seems to be about the current population, within eight to 10 years. Despite this low density, mountain lions were still killed on the roads running through the Black Hills.

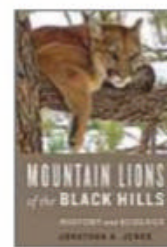
So, you have to wonder why, as Harpur notes, there’s never been a recorded ABC roadkill.

On the other hand, mountain lions range widely. Using radio-collars, Jenks’ group found that some mountain lions dispersed 660 miles (1060km) in a straight line from their last location in the Black Hills. We can assume mountain lions don’t prowl as the crow flies – but it covered the straight-line distance from London to Prague. The average dispersal for males was about

170 miles (270km). So the famous Surrey Puma could have reached Leeds. Females don’t seem to disperse as far. A mountain lion’s average territory size is about 300 square miles (780km²) – about half the area of London. Jenks comments that they can “remain hidden in what might seem like open habitat”. Roosevelt described the mountain lion as “a beast of stealth and rapine ... [that] rarely leaves shelter”. A young, partially blind female with cubs lived near a camp ground. Despite her disability, which would have made hunting the usual prey difficult, she did not attack anyone. A mountain lion’s diet includes deer, beavers, house cats and – somehow – porcupines. Older and ill animals also scavenge.

I could go on. *Mountain Lions of the Black Hills* is packed with insights, information and titbits that make fascinating reading. There’s much for cryptozoologists to ponder, especially as a ‘hard core’ of ABC sighting remains, in my view, unexplained. Biologists and ailurophiles will learn much from, and thoroughly enjoy, this engaging and well-written

Continued on p64



Weird as Lynch?

Given the weirdness of other Bigfoot movies (*SexSquatch* anyone?), this title's a stretch...

The Weirdest Movie Ever Made

The Patterson-Gimlin Bigfoot Film

Phil Hall

Bear Manor Media 2018

Pb, 128pp, \$14.95, ISBN 9781629333564

Phil Hall, responsible for an uneven array of movie-related books, adds another item to the mixed bag. *The Weirdest Movie Ever Made* is debatable as a title. It makes the reader expect something about Alejandro Jodorowsky or David Lynch. 'Weirdest documentary' would be more on-point, but even that might be arguable. If Bigfoot ever proves to be a real creature, as some cryptozoologists believe, then Roger Patterson's famous footage may one day be no more unusual than a video of a panda or mountain gorilla in the zoo.

Hall sometimes seems on the verge of labelling Roger Patterson a fraud, but this impulse is seemingly held in check by good nature. Hall obviously wishes to avoid offense and exudes a cheerful tone. Patterson was touring the country with his film even while dodging a warrant for grand larceny, and his marketing was, in Hall's words, "loud and exploitative". He didn't know if he'd shot at a frame speed of 18 seconds or 24. Perhaps most suspicious of all is the fact that Patterson loaded only one minute's worth of film in his camera. Clearly he was confident about his ability to film a rare beast in a short period of time. The most obvious point about Patterson's creature is that its casual behavior matches that of no wild animal in the wild. And if Bigfoot's an interdimensional apparition,

as ultraterrestrialists would have us believe, how was he so easily captured on film?

Of note is the suggestion that Patterson's Bigfoot might have been modelled on William Roe's description of a female Bigfoot he claimed to encounter in British Columbia in 1955. This would help explain why Patterson's Bigfoot, if indeed a costume, was crafty with saggy mammarys.

Found here is a long list of 50-something 21st century Bigfoot movies that reads like a catalogue for a screening room in Hell, unless you're enticed by such obscure titles as *Bigfoot Wars*, *No Burgers for*

Bigfoot, *Sasquatch: A Love Story* and the no doubt illuminating *SexSquatch*. Apart from a brief citation of *In the Shadow of Bigfoot*, nothing is made of Ivan Marx, whose hoax movies

were clearly inspired by the Patterson film and thus would seem more relevant than most of these films.

A 'Cinematic Appreciation' chapter provides commentaries by 11 film critics whose main qualification is having done some sort of podcast or another. Michael Legge hosts something called 'The Dungeon of Dr Dreck' while Troy Haworth wrote a book on the gory films of Lucio Fulci. Anders Runestad at least has the credentials of having written a book on *Robot Monster*, so he clearly has an affinity for tatty gorilla suits. Runestad classifies the footage in terms of standard horror film technique via an odd and not entirely accurate description of *The Exorcist* that makes that movie sound like a John Carpenter film, which it isn't.

The basic conclusion seems to be "Who knows?" Which is a bit frustrating for those who prefer more solid conclusions.

Brett Taylor

★★★★★



Continued from p63

book. Jenks's love and deep understanding of his subject pervades every page. I just hope the price won't be a barrier to this book reaching the wide general and biological audience it so richly and justly deserves.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

The Viking Way

Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia

Neil Price

Oxbow 2019

Pb, 242pp, illus, bib, ind, £30.00, ISBN 9781842172605

When the first edition of Neil Price's *The Viking Way* came out in 2002, it caused a sensation in the world of Viking-age archaeology. His ambitious attempt to create a 'cognitive archaeology' of religion and magic in pre-Christian Scandinavia tied together textual sources, archaeological evidence and the history of religion into a work that discussed *seiðr*, or sorcery, and other forms of magic, not as a peripheral curiosity or a literary trope but as a vital part of how early mediæval people saw the world. However, the limited print run of the first edition meant that the book is mostly found in university libraries.

Now, after 17 years, Oxbow is releasing a new edition at a price that makes it a must-have for any student of religion and magic in the early Middle Ages.

The Viking Way begins with an overview of the book's goal, summarised as "an archaeology of the Viking mind", then addresses both the textual and archaeological evidence for magic, supernatural beliefs, religious practices, and ritual practitioners. Price discusses the shamanic practices of the Sámi people as well as the broader context of circumpolar religion.

Price's view of magic in Scandinavian religion is particularly focused on gender – sorcery in Old Norse literature, at least, seems to be associated with women or at least to be seen as transgressive when performed by men. Price looks not only at what this can tell us about the view of magic in Iron Age Scandinavia but also how it

can inform our understanding of gender. The book then explores the role of magic in Viking age warfare and violence, including the importance of animalistic and shape-shifting warriors such as the *berserkir* and *ulfheðnar*.

The original book's summary (Chapter 7, 'The Viking Way') addressed the implications of this study for our understanding not just of magic and religion but of the early mediæval Scandinavian worldview. In the new edition, an additional chapter addresses the intervening years of scholarship, much of it prompted by the first edition of *The Viking Way*. This is well worth reading even by those familiar with the first edition.

The Viking Way is a dense, comprehensive study of the archaeology of belief and thought in early mediæval Scandinavia. It helps to have some knowledge of archaeological theory and

Scandinavian history and literature, but Price provides some guidance for readers less familiar with the period.

Where this book really shines is in its comprehensive approach to different types of evidence. Price makes detailed and persuasive arguments based on art, poetry, historical and literary sources, burials,

artefacts, anthropological studies and more. The result is a hefty, scholarly work that's nonetheless rich and compelling reading.

The new edition of *The Viking Way* is essential for anyone interested in the religion and magic of the Viking world. Neil Price grapples with the weirdness, complexity, and ambiguity of this topic and, rather than relegating it to the sidelines, places it firmly at the centre of an ambitious attempt to archaeologically explore the early mediæval mind.

James Holloway

★★★★★

Journey to Cydonia

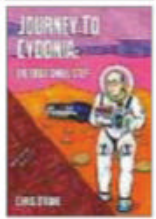
The First Small Step

Chris O'Kane

Other Side Books 2017

Pb, 489pp, £15.99, ISBN 9781983195167

Chris O'Kane is a child of the Space Age who was impressed by the Apollo missions to the Moon, and influenced by science fiction literature, TV series and films like *2001: A Space Odyssey*.





This led to a keen interest in astronomy, so O’Kane had a passing awareness of the ‘face’ on Mars photographed by NASA’s Viking Orbiter 1 in July 1976. He outlines how he slowly collected information on this strange feature and the discovery of other nearby pyramid structures in the Cydonia region that suggested it was part of a city complex.

It was only when he read *Monuments of Mars* in 1988 that he was struck by how much research had been conducted on these apparent anomalies. He had an intense physical and emotional response to the ‘Cliff’ feature illustrated in the book. Following this eureka moment, he decided to contact the Mars Project in the USA.

After contacting Roger Keeling who headed it, O’Kane set up Mars Project UK to further the investigation of these anomalies in Europe. From there he arranged public lectures to show images of the Cydonia area and became engaged in using Apple Mac computers to conduct a fractal analysis of the Viking Orbiter images. This would help weed out natural features of Mars and identify any unusual structures. Using the computers of the 1990s, this was a particularly slow process.

The beauty of this book is that O’Kane provides a good review of how the Mars ‘face’ has slowly come to public attention mixed with his involvement in researching this area and meeting fellow experts. He notes how different factions have emerged and how the most outlandish claims have gained the most publicity. Aligned with the US Mars Project, he has preferred to use evidence and scientific argument to persuade NASA to take more detailed photographs of Cydonia, whereas Richard Hoagland and his supporters have harassed the space agency with outlandish and unsupported claims.

There is a particularly amusing chapter on O’Kane’s meeting with Busty Taylor because there was talk of a connection between Cydonia and crop circles. O’Kane finds this adventure takes him a bit too far into the twilight zone

and prefers to stick with ‘provable science.’

Despite this adherence to scientific principle, O’Kane does not provide enough evidence to show these anomalies are not purely geological structures that through the tricks of light and shadow appear the product of intelligent construction. Despite his talk of critical thinking, by the end of the book he seems to fall in with Robert Bauval’s theories that the pyramids on Mars are linked with the pyramids in Egypt and the origins of religion. O’Kane is certainly moving beyond ‘the first small step’ in his thinking.

This covers his story from 1988 to 1996, so I look forward to reading more of his adventures and discoveries in the next two volumes.

Nigel Watson

★★★★★

Francis Bacon’s Hidden Hand in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*

A Study of Law, Rhetoric, and Authorship

Christina G Waldman

Algora Publishing 2018

Pb, 326pp, £20.00, ISBN 9781628943306

The case for Francis Bacon’s authorship of Shakespeare’s works is undergoing a resurgence, having been eclipsed in recent years by other contenders. This is remiss, as there is plenty to discuss concerning Bacon’s possible hidden literary endeavours, especially in connection with that great legal satire, *The Merchant of Venice*, as Christina Waldman shows. Her premise is more subtle than simply ‘proving’ that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, rather concerned with the question of whether Bacon used himself as the basis of the offstage character of Bellario, the Italian jurist whose advice Portia seeks out. This is not a new idea but Waldman goes to impressive lengths to investigate it, whilst considering what else in the play could indicate the hand of a man whose towering, late-flowering genius ran to all the world’s knowledge, including legal reform in his roles as England’s Attorney General and Lord Chancellor. A man who may well

have employed a salon of writers to further his goal of reform and knowledge. This entails a microscopic examination of Shakespeare’s language in the play, and of the historicity of various legal concepts that underpin the courtroom scenes: notably the contrasting legal systems of law and equity.

The cryptological, cipher-based approach to Bacon’s authorship, having done so much to establish – and undermine – the case for Bacon’s authorship of Shakespeare, is absent here. Instead, the emphasis is on the etymology of certain names and words, the punning intent of which shows how a fascination with allusion, symbolism and allegory gave the play a kalaidescopic richness that perhaps was fully appreciated by only a few learned contemporaries. A graphologist’s 1992 report on the ‘Hand D’ fragment from Sir Thomas More, concluding it was by Bacon, is also reproduced.

The author is a lawyer whose research is impeccably thorough – perhaps too much so, the thicket of details about legal precedence, and tangential facts, proposing some brave but possibly over-reaching connections, may undermine what could be a clearer line of reasoning. It is a potent melange of legal history and literary criticism, whose shape and appeal (at least to a less specialist reader) might have benefited from a more focused purview. Waldman has made an important contribution to the Authorship Question. The evidence for this play’s Baconian influence has force, one that does not necessarily rule out the involvement of the Stratfordian, whom Bacon may have viewed as useful for his plan, his Great Instauration. As too Shaxpere may have done for his plan, for he and Bacon (and others) are not mutually exclusive, and a collaborative Shake-speare, (shaking his spear at truth like Pallas Athene) does not mean the Stratfordians ‘lose’, only those who cling to the fantasy of the writer alone in his Bankside garrett, impervious to the influence of his fellows, requiring only books and his ‘natural born’ genius to shoulder all the work. Those wanting to know more about

Bacon’s wider involvement in the Shake-speare project should look to Simon Miles and Barry Clarke.

Jerry Glover

★★★★★

The Cosmic Mystery Tour

A High-Speed Journey Through Space and Time

Nicholas Mee

Oxford University Press 2019

Hb, 208 pp, illus, index, £16.99, ISBN 9780198831860

If you’re looking for a pain-free introduction to the scientific Universe, you couldn’t find a better one than this new book from Nicholas Mee. It’s a glossy, pocket-sized hardback with eyecatching pictures on almost every page. It covers all the important subjects, from the pioneering work of Newton, Maxwell and Einstein, through cutting-edge science like gravitational waves and the Higgs Boson, to the cosmic mysteries of black holes, dark matter and the Big Bang. Most important of all, Mee understands the paradoxical fact that the general public, hearing professional scientists talk about these awesomely exciting subjects, has a strange tendency to fall asleep.

He isn’t going to let that happen. The book’s title is spot on: it really is a whistlestop tour, flitting rapidly from one idea to the next. Few of the sections are more than a page in length, and the narrative is distinctly nonlinear – so, as with any good mystery tour, you never know what’s coming next. In the space of a few pages you can jump from the Rosetta Stone to the wave theory of light to electron waves to electron microscopes, or from earthquakes to neutron stars to gamma rays to Tutankhamun’s gold mask. You’re assailed with a bewilderingly eclectic mix of images, from van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night’ to the cover of Joy Division’s *Unknown Pleasures* (which depicts radio signals from a pulsar).

The result is an engrossing read that can be recommended to anyone, however much or little they know about the subject.

Andrew May

★★★★★

Tomorrow's superstitions

Rationalism and superstition co-exist in the development of knowledge, so it is fortunate we can simultaneously hold opposing worldviews

Forgotten Science

Strange Ideas from the Scrapbook of History

SD Tucker

Amberley Publishing 2018

Hb, 319pp, bib, notes, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781445686478

From the outset, the reader is aware of the incredible amount of research and organisation that has gone into this exhaustive compilation of the vagaries of the scientific imagination and flawed enquiry. The lengthy introduction spells out the author's project in some detail as "today's science becoming tomorrow's superstition" is explored. We are informed, for example, how early pioneers into blood circulation led to experiments into animal grafting and two-headed dogs! Likewise, how our understanding of electricity sponsored an interest in the reanimation of the dead and how authoritarian regimes seek out scientific philosophies that validate their pernicious ideologies.

To cope with the sheer volume of historical information, SD Tucker has – thankfully – divided his book into four exhaustive chapters running from Utopianism to our collective Artificial Intelligence future.

It would be an easy task for the author to merely mock what we would consider the absurdity of many early scientific thinkers, yet he ensures our awareness of rationalism and superstition coexisting in the marketplace of epistemology.

Opening his exploration with utopian ideas in the broadest sense – from the social body to the environment – he looks at how a figure such as Thomas Beddoes

(1760–1808), a rationalist, did not disabuse folklore regarding cows in his pursuit of a cure for smallpox. 'Science Fictions' considers how our forebears in scientific discovery had to compete with the more transcendental narratives of cosmic design. Abrahamic science, predicated in religious proscription, is critiqued and the persistence of overtly questionable beliefs such as Leonard Jeffries's (b.1937) racial theories of Sun and Ice people and Ibrahim Syed's (b.1979) plasma bound Djinn, for example, are scrutinised and contextualised.

Amidst the history, Tucker's concern appears to be more human. Although documenting the antipathy that may exist between science and religion, he contends that what interests him is our ability to hold two coterminous worldviews. To demonstrate this he includes in his account the significance of quasi-mystical thinktanks such as the Rosicrucian movement and Pansophic philosophy in the search for universal scientific truths.

The remaining three chapters are equally exhaustive and focus on how our contemporary understanding of energy and evolution, cosmology and artificial intelligence have their roots in volatile and mutable dogma and belief systems.

Tucker elucidates the work of many key thinkers and theories in these areas, debunking many and reinforcing the idea that science itself may be an unstable narrative and one that resists its own claims to rationalism. Quite simply, another act of faith! Stalin's advocacy of the disputed



genetics of Lysenko and Lamarck and the Nazi Party's exploitation of fringe scientism and the mystical racism of Isaac Rosenberg (1893–1912), he reminds us – a scientific 'survival of the fittest' – tragically led to the death camps.

On a lighter note there's always August Strindberg (1849–1912) and Nikolai Tesla (1856–1943). Strindberg's crazed curiosity in perpetual motion, the nervous system of plants (why not inject them with cocaine?), interspecies miscegenation and the souls of the dead are reviewed and his dalliance with Swedenborgian cosmology, alchemy and occasional nudity explored in the light of his encroaching mental illness.

Interestingly, Tesla, before his invention of the A/C electrical generator, actively rebutted all things supernatural (excepting his own unique ability to see in the dark and act as a conduit for higher intelligences, a 'meat-machine') and yet saw no reason why science couldn't address thought transference and radio contact with the dead.

In between chatting to his favourite pigeon, he explored the familiar territory of many a putative cult leader – perpetual motion, space travel and cosmic unity.

With a conclusion that looks to our own world Tucker notes how our ongoing scientific obsessions – longevity and the fate of the world – are very much rooted in the 'fantastic' discourse of the past.

A great read and a must for anybody interested in humanity's desire to find answers to the big questions by any means necessary and regardless of credulity.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

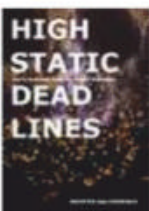
High Static Dead Lines

Sonic Spectres & the Object Hereafter

Kristen Gallerneaux

Strange Attractor Press 2018

Pb, 264pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781907222665



FT reviewers ought to ensure that the books we recommend are, well, fortean. *High Static Dead Lines*

is soaked in forteana. Kristen Gallerneaux is a curator at the Henry Ford Museum, and while a good part of the book is devoted to encounters with 'her' collection, there are a lot of her own experiences here too.

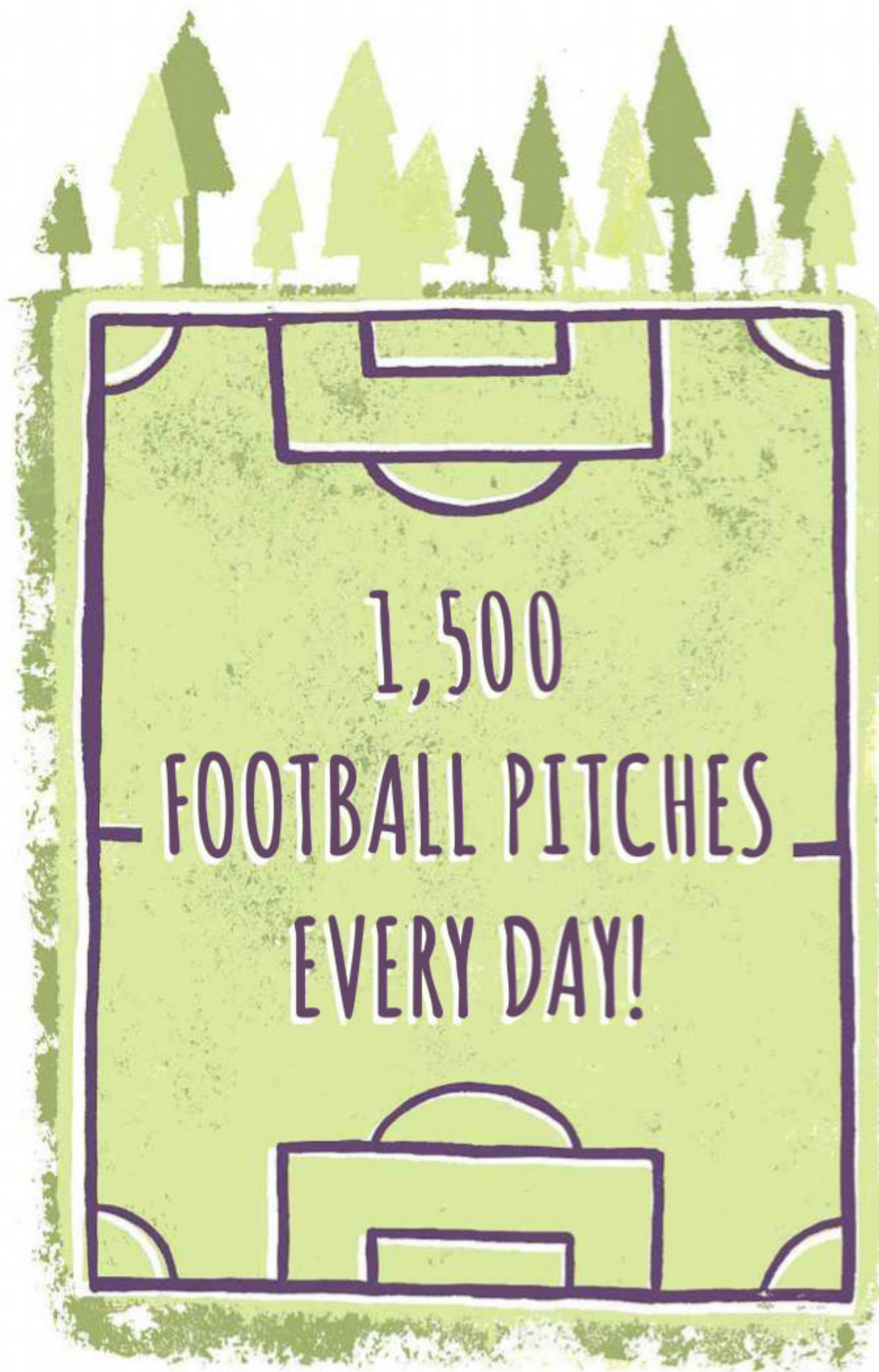
You will find discussions about the technology of séances and the machinery of belief, broadcast hijacks, the Tuckerton broadcast station, and the Radio Pill (the world's smallest FM broadcast station). This is about the magic and ghosts of the radio signal, or at least in part. It is also about the encounters that shaped Gallerneaux's worldview; obsessions with salt, an aunt who was a helicopter pilot, wishbone ships, uncorrupted food and other off-kilter experiences. I found the observations insightful, for example the link between poltergeist manifestations and material culture. Also the comment in the section about a specific location in her childhood that "K.'s memories of the day they visited Black Bridge lack clarity, in parts, but it seems reasonable to allow such distant recollections to oscillate between reality and fiction."

High Static Dead Lines's sections about technology, such as the history and discussion of maser and laser broadcast, use notes at the end. The sections about herself use footnotes to create wider networks of knowledge, knotting into folklore, urban legends and mythology. (I grew up reading Pratchett. Footnotes used well are a thing of beauty.)

High Static Dead Lines is in some ways a personal exploration of phenomena that will open up new perspectives to you through one curator's well informed and creative worldview.

Steve Toase

★★★★★



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UNFAO, Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005-2015

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The woman who fell to Earth

In a surprise to absolutely no one except trolls, *Captain Marvel* isn't an insidious attack on white men but a celebratory superhero flick about friendship, fellow feeling and finding out who you are...



Captain Marvel

Dir Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck,
US 2019
On UK release

While MCU fans are undoubtedly waiting for *Avengers: Endgame* with bated breath, *Captain Marvel* not only delivers Marvel Studios' first female-led superhero adventure, but also introduces audiences to a character who will likely play an integral part in undoing Thanos's devastating snap of his Infinity Gauntlet-clad fingers.

Carol Danvers must have one of the most convoluted back-stories of any Marvel character, but comic fans should be reassured that the film's writers have managed to synthesise decades' worth of lore into something that retains the essential elements but is perfectly accessible for anyone new to the character.

Not that the film makes any concessions early on. From the get-go, we are thrown into an alien world with unfamiliar characters as mansplaining Kree commander Yon-Rogg (Jude Law) trains a young female warrior in preparation for a dangerous mission against rival aliens, the Skrulls. The outer space visuals are subtly familiar thanks to the

Larson delivers a compelling and nuanced portrayal of the character

production design of some of the realms introduced in James Gunn's brilliant *Guardians of the Galaxy* films. However, things are less full-on 'cosmic' and more minimalistic and streamlined here, which at times makes it rather reminiscent of late 1990s science fiction films. Which is fitting, since our titular hero eventually crashes on Earth in 1995, from which point the Nineties vibe is turned up with visual cues, soundtrack choices and pop culture references alluding to the decade during which most of the film is set. However, rather than going on a tiresome nostalgia binge, the filmmakers instead use tone and style to create a movie that not only recalls the action blockbusters of the 1990s but keeps the focus on the story.

As a result, the film, superficially, doesn't look much like the more fantastical instalments in the MCU, instead

offering a more grounded, character-driven piece. Action is not neglected, but storytelling is favoured. The result may strike some as being lacklustre (rather than low-key) in terms of what appeals to many people about the MCU, but it's a choice in perfect keeping with a narrative about a protagonist on a mission to uncover her true identity. The film retains a real sense of mystery for most of its duration, which makes the pay-off of Carol's discoveries feel genuinely empowering – and successfully sells her as someone Thanos most definitely needs to be mindful of in the upcoming *Endgame*.

In terms of casting, the genuine chemistry between leads Brie Larson and Samuel L Jackson is not just sheer fun but also lends the film a buddy cop dynamic that once again serves as a reminder of many films from the decade in which *Captain Marvel* is set. It also means that the trademark MCU humour fits in perfectly. Jackson's Nick Fury is a younger, more playful version of the character (who still has both his eyes) evoking some of Jackson's own Nineties roles, while Ben Mendelsohn's knack for drily sarcastic line delivery gets a good outing in his role as Talos and Goose the cat steals a few scenes.

Brie Larson delivers a compelling and nuanced portrayal of the main character, her innate feistiness and strong-willed nature proving to be a perfect fit for an unapologetically feminist character with a rebellious streak. Evidently, some segments of the public have been very vocal about how upset they are by this, but portraying Carol Danvers in any other way would have been a betrayal of what the character symbolises, and Larson is therefore another pitch-perfect casting choice by Marvel Studios.

Captain Marvel is a solid effort that places itself among the best of the franchise by having

deeply human themes of identity, belonging and compassion at its core. Some may find it slower than other MCU offerings, but by focusing so heavily on character development it provides a solid foundation for how the Avengers Initiative – at this point some way in the future – comes into being, and *Captain Marvel* therefore adds new appeal to the franchise, proving that the MCU can indeed go 'higher, further, faster'.

Lelyla Mikkelsen



Under the Silver Lake

Dir David Robert Mitchell, US 2018
On UK release and VOD from 15 March

For his follow-up to 2014's excellent and genuinely frightening horror movie, *It Follows*, David Robert Mitchell has decided to tackle the noir genre; although since this isn't the 1940s and no one wears trench coats and hats any more it's really a neo-noir. The essential rules of the game are still there though: an ordinary Joe becomes smitten with a mysterious girl and gets dragged into murky goings-on way above his pay grade. Instead of John Garfield and Lana Turner we have Andrew Garfield and Riley Keough.

Garfield plays Sam, a jobless slacker who whiles away his days immersed in retro pop culture and occasionally spies on ladies using the pool in his apartment complex. One day, he spots Sarah (Keough) and after spending an evening with her wants to see her again – but the following morning he learns that she has moved out of her flat during the night, almost as if she had never been there at all. Resolving to track her down, Sam wanders through LA meeting all sorts of weirdos and experiencing all sorts of bizarre events, picking up clues that may or may not lead him to her.



The first thing to say is that, in this film at any rate, Mitchell is quite obviously deeply in thrall to David Lynch – and in my opinion that’s something of a double-edged sword. On the plus side, it means that the film has a spellbinding formal elegance to it: the beautiful widescreen photography lends itself to stunning framings and compositions. On the downside, it means that the film really has nothing concrete to say and becomes merely a succession of surreal events, brilliantly staged but ultimately meaningless.

That said, there is still much to enjoy in the film, particularly in its referencing of innumerable other movies. As the film opens and we see Sam watching his topless hippy neighbour tend to her birds the cognoscenti will instantly recall the opening of Robert Altman’s *The Long Goodbye* (itself a neo-noir, revisionist take on Chandler). Sam’s flat is festooned with movie posters (some of which are direct nods to this film’s forebears, such as *Rear Window*), films are seen on his TV, his mother is a mad keen Janet Gaynor fan and, at one point, a character starts singing ‘Pure Imagination’ from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Spotting all this kind of thing is great fun but, just as when Tarantino does it, it doesn’t add up to all that much.

The film also has a retro attitude towards its female characters. Noir has, of course, often used the overtly sexualised femme fatale as a story focus, but here virtually all the female characters are presented this way. I lost count of the number of hookers, sex slaves, and dolly birds on display, most of whom are required to take some or all of their clothes off during the course of the film.

This is an entertaining and intriguing film which constructs an engrossing narrative out of some pretty unlikely material and ticks a lot of boxes that make noir and neo-noir work. Sadly, it doesn’t tick them all, particularly the one that roots such stories in the everyday, and gives them a genuinely human element; after all, if noir is about anything it’s about deep stuff like morality, honour, corruption and mortality. *Under the Silver Lake* aims for that but misses because, in the end, it’s just too shallow.

Daniel King



THE REVEREND’S REVIEW

FT’s resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

Cannibal Terror

Dir Alain Denuelle, Spain/France 1981
88 Films, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

The Green Inferno

Dir Antonio Climati, Italy 1988
88 Films, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Swamp Thing

Dir Wes Craven, US 1982
88 Films, £19.99 (Dual Format)

Horror needn’t be confined to gothic windswept castles on a stormy night – so here are three brightly-lit flicks to remind us that screams can sound just as shrill in the hot sun of tropical climes.

First up, we have two movies from the 1980s cannibal wave, a seemingly endless list of films spawned by the notorious success of Ruggero Deodato’s thoughtfully horrible *Cannibal Holocaust* (1979). Thoughtful, however, is not a word I’d associate with *Cannibal Terror* (1981), in which a ridiculous trio of small-fry villains kidnap a businessman’s daughter and unwittingly smuggle her into cannibal country. Yes, the film has frequent moments of confused tedium, but it’s peppered with some laugh-out-loud howlers; like when the man thug tells the woman thug she has “flippity-floppity-boobies”, or the severed head



Laura Palmer’s dad morphs into a seven-foot pile of walking duckweed

effect is just a bloke with his bonce sticking up through a table. That, and the dance scenes, made me spit out my whiskey with delight. Be warned, there’s an unpleasant rape scene, but otherwise little else that’s shocking – well, apart from the clumsily edited stock nature footage and the locals and crew who were clearly dragged in to play awkward looking tribesmen. *Cannibal Terror*? Cannibal Chuckles, more like. Which makes it a

perfect drinking film to enjoy with friends.

Less fun is *The Green Inferno* (1988), which suffers from being billed as ‘Cannibal Holocaust 2’. Sure, it has some thematic similarities, but barely belongs on the horror shelf. Accept the film for what it is – a Mondo travel adventure about the search for a missing professor in the Amazon – and you may well enjoy the quirky style, frequent trumpet solos and admittedly stunning photography. But folks expecting a brutal slice of philosophical gore, like its supposed predecessor, are going to have to make do with a scene where a cannibal fish swims up some guy’s bottom and another guy has to tug it out.

There are more than just your bog-standard cannibals lurking in the steamy forests, though. Enter Laura Palmer’s dad morphing into a seven-foot pile of walking duckweed. Yes, it’s *Swamp Thing* (1982) where Ray Wise plays a brilliant bio-engineer who discovers a hybrid animal and plant cell. A bunch of baddies really want it, for some reason. Maybe because it glows in the dark. Adrienne Barbeau has a blast playing the ass-kicking heroine, and her perm is a *Swamp Thing* in and of itself. Wes Craven directs and shows just how darn adaptable he was as a director. It’s still got that down-and-dirty feel of his earlier work, but it’s a conscious approach into more mainstream movies. Just as the cannibal wave seemed fixated on bodies under physical assault, *Swamp Thing* shares a similar, if more nuanced obsession. Some of the most fun moments of the film are seeing this bio-serum turning folks into rubbery mutants.

All three of these sun-soaked horror flicks are released by 88 Films with excellent extras and, especially with the cannibal movies, really impressive picture quality. Which is nice, because cannibals make a lot of effort with their makeup.





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The beast of the Gévaudan

The sources quoted in Theo Paijmans's article on the beast of the Gévaudan [FT377:30-34] were all in English, Dutch and German (i.e. second hand). The French sources are available in a 1901 book by Francois Fabre (reprinted in paperback in 2004). This confirms that there were indeed two beasts – or at least that there were two killed – and includes a detailed anatomical description which might help to identify it.

Martin Jenkins
Eu, Normandy

A gripping classic

I enjoyed reading Nigel Watson's forum article "What is UFO Research?" [FT375:55]. He rightly laments the sad state of UFO research and wonders what form an adequate qualitative approach might take. I submit that a fine example already exists: *Encounter at Buff Ledge: A UFO Case History* by Walter Webb, published by the J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies way back in 1993. In this gripping and absorbing classic of UFO literature, Webb, a former senior lecturer at Boston's Hayden Planetarium, conducted a five-year investigation of an event – a UFO sighting and alleged abduction that took place in 1968 at a summer camp on Lake Champlain near Burlington, Vermont – that is practically unparalleled among UFO researches for its thoroughness and close attention to detail, a refreshing example of credible, professional research.

The Buff Ledge encounter contains both nuts and bolts and high strangeness aspects and Webb objectively and willingly scrutinises any investigative lead regardless of its outcome. He considers all the evidence: empirical data, psychological factors, the intricacies and inadequacies of human perception, and the possibility of a truly paranormal or anomalous event. He has no axe to grind and doesn't promote one possible explanation over another. Rather, he gathers and presents the evidence, leaves no stone unturned, and offers what is quite possibly one of the few examples of truly competent



Chilean mutants

I photographed this four-horned ram and bicephalous calf, born on Patagonian farms and exhibited in the Museo Regional Salesiano in Punta Arenas, Chile, on 5 December 2018.

Marinus van der Sluijs *Vancouver, Canada*

UFO research.

It's clear that at first Webb wanted to believe that the abduction and sighting as reported by the eyewitnesses, yet admits that the evidence suggests the percipients may have exaggerated their stories as a result of suggestion via hypnotic regression, or from false memories. Nevertheless, he makes no demands of his reader to believe or disbelieve. *Encounter at Buff Ledge* remains an essential work of UFO literature and a valuable resource and example for how to appropriately conduct effective research of the anomalous.

Eric Hoffman
Vernon, Connecticut

Sure and certain hope

I am puzzled by a point made by Alan Murdie in his article 'Haunted HS2' [FT375:19]. Interesting and entertaining as ever, he refers to Native Americans not tolerating the disturbance of their burial grounds. Doubtless so and doubtless wise; I've seen *Polytergeist*. However, as the graves in question are nominally Christian, for the most part, I do not see why this is a problem. I understand Christian burials are meant to be temporary, carried out as they are in the sure and certain hope of

the Resurrection. In the process of moving the remains, presumably there's a risk of parts being mixed up, damaged or even lost. I'm pretty sure God could sort any such problems pretty easily, come the great getting-up-in-the-morning day.

Brian McTaggart
Dundee

SHC calculations

Alexander Whiteside makes a number of observations with respect to my 'back of an envelope' calculation of the thermodynamic viability of Spontaneous Human Combustion [FT373:73]. Reviewing my original calculation [FT368:75], I regret I didn't sanity-check my own source data. The figure I used for the specific energy of tallow – 39.693 kJ/kg – cannot be correct, as it is several orders of magnitude less than the specific energy of diesel fuel. The figure should in all probability be 39.693 MJ/kg. Using this figure and keeping other assumptions the same yields a combustion energy of 1190.79 MJ – easily enough to evaporate the body's water content.

I also neglected to consider the calorific value of the body's protein content on the one hand, and the ~140 MJ latent heat of vapourisation on the other (although the latter is small in the context of the general uncertainty in these calculations).

An attempt to determine the approximate heat of combustion of human tissue (fat, bone, protein and all) is reported by AM Christensen ('Debunking the Spontaneous Human Combustion Myth: Experiments in the Combustibility of the Human Body', University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2000). The estimated value was 17 MJ/kg, which appears consistent with a material comprising highly calorific fat, mixed with other less readily combustible materials. For a 100kg (220lb) human this would equate to a combustion energy of 1700 MJ – relatively close to the 1190.79 MJ estimate above, and again, easily sufficient to evaporate all that water.

I stand corrected.
Ian l'Anson
By email



Bobbiting

Simon Young's rumination on the place name Bobbitt's Hole [FT376:27] brought to mind a rather pleasing lexilink – to the briefly infamous John Wayne Bobbitt, who, in 1993 had his penis severed and thrown into a field by his wife Lorena in revenge for his selfish behaviour during sex. It was later found and successfully reattached, leading to John Wayne Bobbitt having a brief career in porn based on the notoriety he achieved through his wife's trial for the attack [FT75:28-33]. The term 'Bobbiting' was briefly in vogue for similar assault, and a then newly discovered worm with pincer jaws was named the Bobbit Worm.

Stuart Cooley

By email

Teenage manipulation?

I very much enjoyed Peter McCue's article "The Cosmic Joker" [FT376:30-35]. It reminded me of the notion that we are all just part of a computer simulation. What if there is a teenager playing a game where you earn points to buy "special characters" such as Aliens, Ghosts, Black Dogs, Sea Monsters etc, which (s)he can add to the game for limited periods of time?

Steve Hulford

Braintree, Essex

Seen en route

Re: Human Hyperpedestrianism [FT376:36-41], here's a more recent example with a twist.

On 24 September 1951, Har-



Kikinda, Serbia



Canberra, Australia

Owl on a stick

For many happy years, we Canberrans have been the proud custodians of the world's best phallus-shaped owl statue (or, as we like to call it, our "Owl on a stick that looks like a dick"). But now those rotten Serbs have erected an owl on a stick that looks even more like a dick than ours. Bastards! According to the ABC News report on 16 November, "The recently installed phallic figure stands 2.4 metres tall on a roundabout in the town of Kikinda in northern Serbia. It has been drawing ridicule locally and making world news for its striking silhouette."

Tony Healy Florey, Canberra

risson E Bailey, 24, was hiking from Chicago to St Louis along State Highway 7. He was dressed totally in green (including shoes, goggles and backpack) and was pushing a huge 5ft (1.5m) tractor tyre painted green, the centre of which exhibited signs promoting various products and public events. He accepted these jobs during holidays as he worked full time in a steel mill.

Bailey was walking through a wooded area when he felt a burning in his neck and saw a silvery grey, oval-shaped

object ahead in the woods. He felt paralysed. Two beings appeared at a window of the craft and asked him several questions. Under hypnosis he recalled that when he approached the craft, about a dozen small beings, 18in (45cm) tall, walked towards him and jumped against him, making high-pitched noises. They appeared frog-like and had large slanted eyes, with slit-like mouths and brown striped skin. Smaller bug-like beings were also present. He ran from the area, but felt heaviness and passed out. Later he continued walking and again encountered the object. Under deeper hypnosis he remembered waking up inside the object, lying on a soft bed while a light shone on his face. Two 5ft (150cm) -tall hu-

manoid beings approached. They had flat faces, hidden behind transparent shields and wore a one-piece suit with helmets. After the incident, the witness suffered from chronic ill health; allegedly "his internal organs were three times older than they should be".

The case was investigated by Ann Druffel in the late 1970s, when the witness had become a licensed Baptist minister and had put an advert in the *Los Angeles Times* and even appeared in a local TV programme asking for information about "flying saucer diseases". After the initial investigation was concluded, in November 1978 he took a dozen Polaroid photos of his alien molesters (who apparently materialised and dematerialised inside his small apartment), partially hidden behind a couple of Hallowe'en masks! The photos are generally considered a fraud (who knew?), despite Druffel's protestations.

- In the context of marathons, one should consider the experience of one participant in the 3,100-mile (4,990km) nonstop transcontinental Race Across America in 1983, as recounted in *Scientific American* (Feb 2005) by the witness himself.

"In the wee hours of the morning on August 8, 1983, while I was travelling [by bicycle] along a lonely rural highway approaching Haigler, Nebraska, a large craft with bright lights overtook me and forced me to the side of the road. Alien beings exited the craft and abducted me for 90 minutes, after which time I found myself back on the road with no memory of what transpired inside the ship. I can prove that this happened because I recounted it to a film crew shortly afterward".

The abductee was none other than Michael Shermer, editor-in-chief of *Skeptic* magazine. He finally explained that his experience was triggered by sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion that transmogrified his support motorhome and the members of his team into UFOs and aliens.

Luis R González

Spain



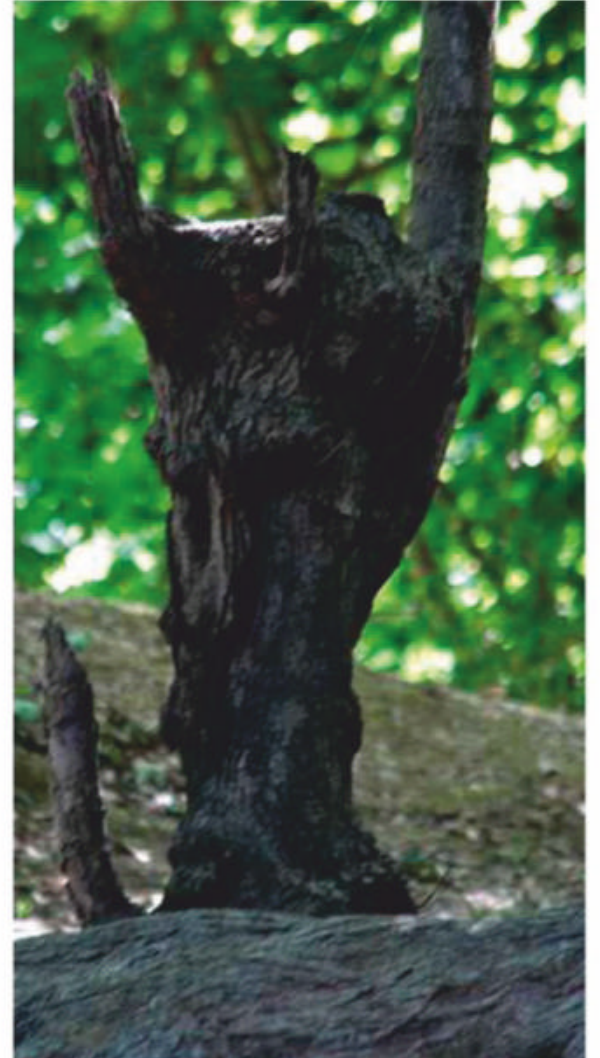
PAUL TAYLOR

SIMULACRA CORNER

Faces and figures in nature sent in by *FT* readers



Andrew Hardwick photographed this oak elephant in Staverton Thicks, an area of primæval woodland near Butley, East Suffolk, memorably described by historian of the British countryside Oliver Rackham as an “awesome place of Tolkienesque wonder and beauty”.



Anthony Giuliano found this tree in Northport, New York, and thought it resembled the head of the god Pan.



Another creature from Staverton Thicks, courtesy of Andrew Hardwick, this time an oak grebe.



A final example of Suffolk simulacra from Andrew: a Boar's head on Gipping Valley path, East Suffolk.

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Chanctonbury Ring

For months I had contemplated walking the full length of the South Downs Way in southern England. I estimated that it would take six days starting in Winchester, Hampshire, and terminating at Eastbourne, Sussex. With an overlaid pack I boarded the train out from London and wove my way through the mediæval lanes of Winchester to reach the starting point of the SDW. Perfect warm and sunny weather put me in high spirits as buildings thinned and the trail struck its way across idyllic farmland. The prehistoric sites marking the way create the sense of an ancient trail. Winchester Hillfort was blanketed in wild summer flowers and a seaward view misted out across the flatness of the Solent. Swells of burial mounds undulated on either side of the trail.

Topographically, Chanctonbury Ring (right) represents the highest point of the SDW. After I crossed the river at Amberley, a merciless deluge of cold rain poured down, and mist reduced visibility to a few metres. I pushed onwards up the gravel track that cascaded with gushing water. My approach to Chanctonbury felt hopelessly bogged down by the unseasonal weather. As the tree cluster that towers over the site loomed into view through the mist, I felt a sense of consolation.

Determined to gain a respite from the rain that was now more intense than ever, I stepped within its boundaries for shelter. The concentrically ridged circles immediately created a sense of sanctuary. Underfoot the soft moss padding gave the turf a springy feel. The hiss and howl of the rain and wind seemed strangely amplified within the hilltop space. I considered whether to make a short-term stop, or indeed pitch the tent and wait for the weather to improve. At this point disorientation



PRIORYMAN / CREATIVE COMMONS

fogged my thinking. I began to wander the perimeter and felt as if I was unintentionally heading more and more into Chanctonbury's centre or heart. My instinct was to break out despite the torrential rain, wind and mist. I halted at the edge of the wooded tree circle and looked outwards, but struggled to perceive the open space beyond it. Oddly, I then proceeded to feel a rise in air temperature. Looking back towards the heart, it appeared that the interior was starting to glow with increasing luminosity until it was a startling white glare, resembling a bleached-out photograph. The rainfall through the tree canopy suddenly stopped. Knowing I had to get away, I hoisted up my backpack and suddenly found myself back on the trail striding away from Chanctonbury Ring. As it receded far behind me, the weather cleared. In retrospect there was something climactic about ascending to Chanctonbury, as if it was a knot of tension only eased by putting it behind me. Any number of burial mounds and other ancient sites littered the rest of the SDW, but none

of them seemed to share Chanctonbury's sense of latent energy and significance.

Christian Doubble
London

Actual Surrey Puma

When I was 11 in the autumn of 1988, my parents and I were driving through the Surrey woodlands near Box Hill in the early evening twilight when a puma walked out in front of the car, its eyes reflected in the headlights. It snarled and ran off into the woods. All of us saw it, and it was definitely a puma. When I told the landlord of the pub where we stopped off to eat, he calmly replied that a lot of the locals reported seeing these ABCs and he believed that they had lived in the woods for years.

Ben Nunn
Mitcham, Surrey

Canary truck

I am a trucker by trade and would like to tell you about something that happened to me in March 2015.

I was on a nocturnal run from

Tamworth to Ellesmere Port, and decided to make my usual pit stop at Sandbach services on the M6 north. In those days you could park opposite the main doors on the coach spaces, which was handy. On this particular night I headed for my usual spot. There were already two articulated trucks there, with a space between them. As I slowly pulled in between them, I noticed the truck on my right was a bright, highly polished, canary yellow cab and trailer, like a show truck at a truck fest. There were no markings on it, no company name, just plain canary yellow. Chromed mudguards, mudflaps, wheels, mirrors. It looked fantastic. There was no driver visible. I don't remember what made it was – maybe a Volvo. I intended to get out, stretch my legs, and take a closer look. This truck was parked 2ft (60cm) away from me. I turned to the left to grab my flask for a cuppa and turned round again to take another look. I found I was looking at an empty space – the truck had disappeared. If it had driven off I would have heard the engine fire up, but in the

space of three or four seconds it would have been impossible.

Was it a time slip... or a ghost truck? I was dumbfounded. I looked left at the other driver, but he was busy doing a crossword.

Stevie Allsopp

By email

Loud tapping

Back in the 1990s I worked at Burntwood Lane Social Education Centre, a day care centre for adults with learning disabilities located in the grounds of an old Victorian psychiatric hospital. There were always reports of strange occurrences there. For example, two colleagues once reported locking up the building after a day's work at 5pm. They made sure there was no one left in the building; the clients had all gone home an hour earlier. As they walked up the slope to the car park, there was a loud and repetitive tapping on a window as if someone were tapping on the glass with keys. They turned around but there was no one to be seen. Neither of them had the nerve to go back and investigate.

Another colleague reported seeing an elderly man sitting in the toilet area. He was not a staff member, client or volunteer and faded away after a few seconds. When I last worked there in May 1998, at the height of a warm spring, some colleagues and I were with clients in the sensory room when the whole place suddenly became freezing cold; we could even see our breath appear as on a cold day. After a minute or so the temperature returned to normal. We had no idea what caused this. The SEC closed in 2014 and is now used as a storage facility.

Chris Cromer

Kingston upon Thames

Sheffield haunting

Regarding Tony Sandy's letter about ghost sightings on stairs [FT373:71], I would like to relate several experiences that happened to my family and me while resident at my nan's house in the northern suburbs of Sheffield from the



1950s to late 1970s. My nan was resident at this address from the late 1940s and there was a rumour that one of the workmen had died during its construction. There were many reported incidents, all of which seemed to centre on the stairs and attic, of which the following are the ones I remember hearing about the most.

My nan had witnessed a man walking upstairs while she was walking from the living room to the kitchen. Thinking it was one of her sons-in-law, she said nothing – but then she found said son-in-law sitting at the kitchen table reading a newspaper. A quick investigation revealed there was nobody upstairs. While coming home on the last bus one night, an aunt saw a strange face peering out of the window at the bottom of the stairs next to the front door as the bus passed the house. Again, nobody could be found in the house. My dad witnessed a figure on the landing watching him while he was decorating the stairs. It vanished after a few seconds.

Although I never (knowingly) saw anything, I did have two experiences. When I was seven I was reading in bed one night when there was a very loud sound of someone cracking a whip three times that came from the direction of the stairs. My dad, watching television in the living room, also heard it – he thought it must be me, but by the time he left the living room I was already hiding under the bedclothes. The second experience was shortly after my nan had died, when her eldest daughter came to visit. She had gone to the bathroom upstairs. We heard the toilet flush and then the bathroom door open.

A couple of seconds later there was the sound of something smashing and my aunt screaming. Apparently as she was crossing the landing (fairly large since it was a four-bedroomed house), a plant pot had whizzed past her head and smashed into the top of the stairs, leaving her a quivering wreck. That was in 1977 and we left shortly afterwards.

Karl Ravenstone

Thirsk, North Yorkshire

Lifting the latch

In 2009/10 my wife and I lived in the end terrace of a block of four houses in Rixton, Cheshire, and at the time we were the only people living in the block. The four appeared to be built around the shell of a much older building: while the outside was believed to be Victorian, early brickwork exposed in the lofts suggested a Georgian date.

One evening, I was stir-frying on the oven hob and looking towards the kitchen door, which led to the lit living room, no more than 5ft (1.5m) away. I watched the door-latch lift and the door open, and naturally assumed it was my wife, as we were the only two people in the house. But it wasn't her: she was upstairs and also heard the door-latch lifting and the door opening. She thought it was me opening the door. Now, the door latch was stiff and if fastened could only be opened with your hand. For example, if you tried to open it by pushing the latch with your elbow it would not open. I actually saw the latch lift, which is why I thought my wife was about to walk in. I subse-

quently tried to balance the latch to see if it could move, but short of pushing the door it would never move.

Later that year we heard birdsong in the living room around 9pm in the dead of winter. It sounded as if the birds were actually in the room! The birdsong resembled that of a pet bird, such as a budgie, but we couldn't say for certain. The sound just appeared in the room and carried on for less than a minute. Of course, we had a look around the house trying to find the source, but we only heard it in the living room, and nowhere else or even outside.

We might be forgiven for wondering if the house was "haunted", whatever that might mean. Certainly my wife didn't like being in the house alone. But, thanks to the nature of village life, we knew a person who lived in the same house for decades and he insisted they hadn't had any similar experiences for over 60 years. (Neither had there been in the other houses in the block). We later moved into the adjacent house which seemed a much more welcoming place.

Jim D

Warrington, Cheshire

Wall bundle

When I was a teenager, we lived in a council house previously owned by a little old lady. I used to like to listen to music in my bedroom while studying, but the volume on my cassette player kept dipping. One day I became particularly irate at the sound fading on Duran Duran (pictured above) and shouted at the player while turning it up again. I then heard a loud tut and a sigh – followed by the volume dipping again. I started to use headphones.

A few months later my beloved brother hurled a cricket bat at me, which missed but made a hole in the wall. Inside the cavity was a pink plastic curler, a lock of hair and an American tan stocking tied into a bundle. Can anyone shed any light on why this was in the wall – and could it be linked to my Simon Le Bon-hating visitor?

Becky Hewlitt

Burnham on Sea, Somerset

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

Marie Laveau

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

IN 1971, THE NATIVE AMERICAN ROCK BAND REDBONE HAD A HIT SINGLE...

THE WITCH QUEEN OF NEW ORLEANS!



A HAT-TIP TO THE BEANS

HARDLY ANYONE KNEW THAT THEY WERE SINGING ABOUT A REAL PERSON—
MARIE LAVEAU,
THE VODOO QUEEN!
(1801–1881)



SHE BECAME THE MOST FAMOUS VODOO PRACTITIONER OF HER TIME! SHE CURED THE SICK, AND HELD RITUALS DEEP IN THE WOODS... EVEN RICH WHITE PEOPLE, WHO CLAIMED TO DESPISE FOLK SUPERSTITIONS, WERE AMAZED BY HER POWERS OF DIVINATION!



...THOUGH SCEPTICS SAID THAT THE REAL SOURCE OF HER "DIVINATIONS" WERE THE SERVANTS SHE BRIBED WHEN SHE VISITED RICH HOUSEHOLDS AS A FASHIONABLE HAIRDRESSER!



SHE KEPT A PET SNAKE CALLED "ZOMBI," AFTER AN AFRICAN GOD...



...AND SHE WAS SAID TO BE ABLE TO CURE ANY AILMENT...



HER DEATH DID NOT PUT AN END TO HER CAREER! WITHIN DAYS OF HER BURIAL SHE WAS, INEVITABLY, SEEN WALKING THE STREETS OF NEW ORLEANS!



A TRADITION SPANG UP: IF YOU WANT MARIE TO GRANT YOU A WISH, YOU DRAW AN "X" ON HER TOMB, TURN AROUND THREE TIMES, KNOCK LOUDLY AND SHOUT OUT YOUR HEART'S DESIRE!
(THIS STILL GOES ON!)



IN 1982, A PUNK BAND CALLED THE MISFITS WERE ARRESTED WHEN THEY TRIED TO EXHUME HER BODY!



* KEVIN JACKSON HAS WAITED MANY YEARS TO WRITE THIS LINE!

OVER THE LAST FEW DECADES, MARIE LAVEAU HAS INSPIRED SONGS, NOVELS AND COMIC BOOKS, AND MOST RECENTLY SHE HAS APPEARED AS A CHARACTER IN SEVERAL TV SHOWS, SUCH AS "AMERICAN HORROR STORY"—WHERE SHE WAS PLAYED BY
ANGELA BASSETT...



...AND MARIE HAD A PART IN, OF ALL T.V. SERIES, THE "BIG BANG THEORY" SPINOFF "YOUNG SHELDON"...



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FORTEAN TIMES 379

ON SALE 25 APRIL 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Promising rugby player Sam Ballard was 19 when he swallowed a garden slug at a party in Sydney in 2010 for a dare (FT366:23). He was taken to hospital after spells of dizziness and vomiting, and was found to have been infected with rat lungworm (*Angiostrongylus cantonensis*), a parasite normally found in rats but also in snails and slugs when they eat rat droppings. Ballard then contracted eosinophilic meningoencephalitis and lapsed into a coma for 420 days, after which he was diagnosed with a serious brain injury. Further complications from the original infection left him paralysed and in need of constant care. He died in hospital on 2 November 2018, aged 28. *independent.co.uk*, *Eve Standard*, 5 Nov; *Metro*, 6 Nov 2018.

A 61-year-old hunter died from complications of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (aka Mad Cow disease) after eating squirrel brains. In 1997 the *New York Times* published an article entitled "Kentucky Doctors Warn Against a Regional Dish: Squirrels' Brains." Squirrels are a popular food in rural Kentucky, where people eat either the meat or the brains but generally not both. According to Dr Weisman, families that eat brains follow certain rituals. He elaborated: "Someone comes by the house with just the head of a squirrel and gives it to the matriarch of the family. She shaves the fur off the top of the head and fries the head whole. The skull is cracked open at the dinner table and the brains are sucked out." It is a gift-giving ritual. The second most popular way to prepare squirrel brains is to scramble them in white gravy, he said, or with eggs. In each case, the walnut-sized skull is cracked open and the brains are scooped out for cooking. *boingboing.net*, 18 Oct 2018.

Last issue, we reported the death last May of Tallmadge Wakeman D'Elia from Florida, when a vape pen exploded and shot pieces of the device into his skull [FT377:80]. On 27 January 2019, the same accident befell William Brown, 24, from Fort Worth, Texas. A vaporiser pen battery blew up when he tried to use it, sending shards of metal into his face and neck and severing his carotid artery. He died of a stroke two days later. The National Fire Data Center says there have been 195 documented cases of exploding e-cigarettes between 2009 and 2016, 29 per cent of which caused severe injuries. Another report from the University of North Texas Health Science Center looked at US

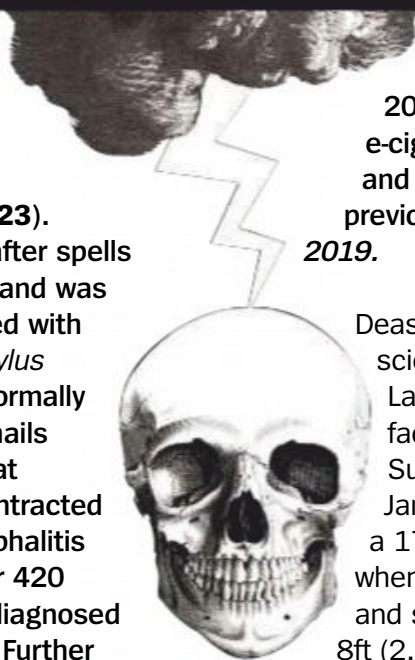
emergency room data from 2015 to 2017 and found 2,035 e-cigarette related explosion and burn injuries – far more than previous reports. *BBC News*, 5 Feb 2019.

Deasy Tuwo, 44, was the leading scientist at the CV Yosiki Laboratory, a crocodile breeding facility in Tomohon, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. On 11 January she was throwing meat to a 17ft (5m) crocodile called Merry when it reared up on its hind legs and snatched her from the top of an 8ft (2.4m) concrete wall. Colleagues found her remains in Merry's jaws. Her mutilated body, minus an arm, was later recovered from the shallow water. Merry had previously killed another crocodile in the pool. *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 15 Jan 2019.

A man was killed by a wild elephant after his speeding car hit the animal at dusk near Khao Yai National Park in northeastern Thailand. When its back legs were hit, the enraged pachyderm stomped on the car, destroying the engine and killing the driver. *Queensland Times*, 1 Dec 2018.

After venturing out to feed the pigs on 1 February, a 56-year-old Russian farmer apparently fainted or suffered an epileptic seizure. Her husband, feeling unwell, had gone to bed early the day before. After waking to find his wife missing, he came upon her body in the pen. She died of blood loss, having suffered severe bites to her face, ears and shoulders. Their farm is in a village in the Malopurginsky district of Udmurtia, east of the city of Kazan. It is not the first time a farmer has been eaten by his own pigs; it happened to an Oregon man in 2012. Authorities found Terry Vance Garner's dentures and pieces of his body in the pig pen. The 69-year-old may have been knocked over by the 50-stone (318kg) animals before they ate him. *BBC News*, 7 Feb; *Independent (online)*, 8 Feb 2019.

Hazel Bradley, 13, of Caerphilly, South Wales, hanged herself accidentally on 23 May after sleepwalking into a wardrobe dressed in her school uniform, a coroner has ruled. She had a history of sleepwalking and was said to be scared of her wardrobe after watching the cartoon film *Monsters, Inc.* How she fatally hanged herself in a wardrobe is hard to visualise; was her fear of such furniture in some sense justified? *D.Express*, *Sun*, 2 Nov 2018.



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